Masculinity and Shell Shock in the Poetry of Siegfried Sassoon: Soldier of Trauma and Poet of Abjection

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Abstract

This dissertation assesses potential links between masculinity and shell shock, explored through a psychoanalytic perspective in the First World War poetry of Siegfried Sassoon. I suggest that Sassoon, through his poetry, critiques the idea of a heteronormative, hypermasculinity that was propagated throughout the period of WW1. The pressure to perform in the hypermasculine area of war resulted in emotional conflict for Sassoon subliminally explored through his writing, which allowed him to express a personal critical evaluation of masculinity in the war period. The personal perspective offered by Sassoon, leads to a wider critique, as Sassoon's poetry offers a social perspective on the presentation of a desired masculinity that the period required. This study suggests that there are inextricable links between performing heteronormative hypermasculinity and shell shock.

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Contents

Introduction

Attention to psychoanalysis began to garner wider interest during the First World War, particularly because of the phenomena of shell shock. As physicians and psychiatrists sought to understand the debilitating and shocking symptoms of shell shock, psychoanalysis offered insights into addressing why some soldiers displayed symptoms of shell shock, even though they had not served on the front line in direct combat. This led to a focus that emphasised the psychical as opposed to solely physical reasons of soldiers displaying symptoms of shell shock.

One other central defining feature of the war was the construct of masculinity propagated in a particular military form. Many critics have highlighted the theme of military masculinity as an area of scholarly consideration. Ana Carden-Coyne (2013) suggests that interdisciplinary research on masculinity in war should be conducted in order to explore resistance to the cultural image of masculinity inherited from the masculine codes and ideals of late-Victorian and Edwardian society, such as expectations of stoicism, heroism, and chivalry (Shephard, 2000), and the ideals of 'unconquerable manhood' and heroic sacrifice (Koureas, 2007). Despite the fact that shell shock and masculinity are two of the prominent characterising features of the First World War, there is a glaring omission in scholarly literature, between the construct of masculinity and its potential contribution to shell shock. This study focuses on the problematic links between shell shock and masculinity explored from a psychoanalytical perspective and addressed through the First World War poetry of Siegfried Sassoon.

Sassoon, at times, presents as an archetypal model of masculinity: a courageous, patriotic heterosexual war hero who was awarded the Military Cross for Bravery. Yet he was also a homosexual, a subversive poet, a resolute protestor

against the futility of war, and was deemed a ‘lunatic’ by the War Office (Davies, 1998). The contradictions within Sassoon were explored through his poetry, with the underpinning theme of masculinity. My overarching question is: ‘How did Sassoon use his poetry to explore his conflicted masculinity in the war period, and did this exploration lead him to infer a correlation between performing a culturally expected masculinity and shell shock?’

The symptoms of shell shock were documented throughout the war. Charles Myers, a war physician, coined the term ‘shell shock’, which first appeared in the medical journal *The Lancet* in 1915. Myers cited three short case studies of soldiers, all attributing the cause of the condition to artillery shells bursting about them, described by one as feeling ‘like a punch on the head, without any pain after it’ (Myers, 1915, pp. 316-317). Myers suggested that the high-frequency vibrations caused a commotion in the brain. He later regretted the term, no doubt aware of the repercussions of its limitations in failing to account for any psychical origin, and described it as being ‘a singularly ill-chosen term; and in other respects, a singularly harmful one’ (Myers, 1940, p. 26).

Common symptoms of shell shock consisted of shaking, paralysis and an inability to walk or speak coherently, while other symptoms presented as visual and sensory issues, described in some detail by officers. ‘The eyes pop out […], the expression becomes fixed and glassy. […] The heart works in short, convulsive beats’. Another physician described the symptoms as follows: ‘men in this state break down in tears if asked to describe their experiences at the front’ (Downing, 2016, p. 78-79). One officer suggested that ‘a man instinctively masks his emotions almost as a matter of routine’, the result being,

> ‘loss of control, hysteria, irresponsible chattering, mutism, amnesia, inhibition of the senses, acute mania, insensibility, etc., with the

> diagnosis of a nervous breakdown or shell shock. Fear of being found afraid. Any emotion which has to be repressed or concealed' (Downing, 2016, p. 78-79).

Another officer described his shell shock to the War Office as being the result of 'the repression of fear, the repression of the emotion of being afraid' (Southborough, 1922, p. 16). The officers' testimonies allude to the idea that they were suffering from a fear of not appearing masculine.

The symptoms of shell shock described were similar to those found with hysteria, including paralysis and convulsions, but with no apparent physical injury.

> 'During the 1880s, Charcot published the case histories of more than 60 male "hysterics" […] Between a third and a quarter of the overall number of hysterical patients he presented in his printed works were men or children' (Micale, 1990, p. 365).

Eventually, Freud suggested that hysteria was rooted in repressed memories of a sexual nature (Freud, 1896). Despite the similarities and evidence of hysteria existing in males, the military resisted using the term, no doubt due to its association with women as it would be seen to be emasculative.

A range of medical doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists and analysts treated soldiers for shell shock during WW1. Medical treatment, in the early years of the war, initially consisted of 'general anaesthesia as a treatment (ether and chloroform), while others preferred application of electricity. [...] Towards the end of 1918 anaesthetic and electrical treatments of shell shock were gradually displaced by modified Freudian methods psychodynamic intervention' (McKenzie, 2012, p.29). Physicians treating soldiers for shell shock including Sandor Ferenczi and Ernst Simmel, both influenced by Freud's work, used psychoanalytical techniques in their treatment of soldiers. Ferenczi suggested that symptoms of shell shock were similar to conversion or anxiety hysteria. Meanwhile, Simmel utilised analytic conversation and dream interpretation

as part of his work with shell shocked soldiers. Karl Abraham's approach to the treatment of shellshock, who initially worked as a surgeon the war, illustrates the shift from the physical to the psychical approach to treating shell shock.

> *'*When I founded a unit for neuroses and mental illness in 1916, I completely disregarded all violent therapies as well as hypnosis and other suggestive means. I allowed patients to abreact while they were awake and tried to explain origin and nature of their suffering by means of a kind of simplified psychoanalysis. Thus I managed to create a sense of being understood in patients and achieved comprehensive relaxation and improvement.' (Brunner, 2017, p.357).

Through the treatment of shell shocked soldiers, observations were made that led various professionals, including those who were not analysts, to identify the common theme of regression to childhood in the soldiers' states, thus highlighting a collective psychoanalytical underpinning model toward understanding the causes of shell shock.

The psychiatrist Rivers believed that shell shock 'returned adult soldiers to the primitive modes of functioning of children, exposing the psychic core of infancy; he noted that the symptoms of shell-shocked soldiers were child-like' (Rivers, 1932, p. 75). '[D]eep in the unconscious of man there always lurks that desire', wrote psychiatrist William White, for the 'feeling of safety we once knew as children when we were able always to flee from danger to the fostering care of a mother' (White, 1919, p. 67).The psychologist MacCurdy (1918) noted similarities between the symptoms of soldiers with shell shock and the actions of children having tantrums, which further suggested that there was a regression taking place. Another psychologist, McDougall (1920), also documented cases where soldiers suffering from war trauma were unable to talk or walk and were thereby reduced to an infantile state. These cases of regression led to the idea that the origins of shell shock might lie in the conflicts of early childhood.

One analyst, Ernest Jones (Ferenczi et al., 1921), inferred that fear was the central issue in war neurosis. He concluded that 'neurosis always entailed a combination of 'the present and the old', and the keys to understanding war neurosis could be found in the unresolved unconscious conflicts of childhood' (Jones, 1918, p. 31). Another analyst, Karl Abraham, documented case studies where one shell-shocked soldier had 'gone back to the mode of expression of a child hardly two years old' (Abraham, 1921, p. 26).

Links from shell shock back to childhood and the maternal were also described by analyst David Eder, who suggested that trauma 'revealed the desire to return to the infantile dependence on the mother and the undisputed claim to her whole care and tenderness' (Eder, 1917, p. 73). It is a point echoed by physical Paul Dane who observed that in cases of amnesia, in the moment before memory loss, the solider would be thinking of his mother (Dane, 1927). Another analyst, Otto Rank, also concluded that anxiety can be traced back to birth and to the child's first separation from the mother, and that this trauma establishes the blueprint for later anxieties (Rank, 1924). Psychoanalyst Ernst Simmel also reflected on the significance of childhood in war neurosis:

> 'Many soldiers who have broken down solely under the pressure of discipline show […] an attitude of father defiance in consequence of an infantile mother fixation as the subconscious condition of their need for opposition' (Ferenczi et al., 1921, p. 31).

Diagnosis and treatment of shell shock depended upon the soldier's social class. Officers from the middle and upper classes were diagnosed with neurasthenia – a term essentially used to refer to the combined symptoms of exhaustion, nightmares and depression – and sent to hospitals to receive treatment. Lower-ranking soldiers from the working classes were diagnosed with conversion hysteria – a condition with

symptoms that were exhibited in the body as opposed to the psychological symptoms of mental disorders. Some soldiers were condemned as ‘lunatics’ and put in asylums (Downing, 2016, p. 87). Myers, a psychologist, while siding with the psychical impact, still noted that sufferers were split between ‘good and bad: the former often a highly intelligent person […] the latter, usually of feeble intellect’ (Myers, 1940, pp. 36). The good and the bad may as well read the middle to upper classes and the working classes respectively.

Sassoon was diagnosed with shell shock when he stated his conscientious objection to the war, although both he and his doctor at Craiglockhart Hospital, the psychiatrist W.H.R. Rivers, refuted this diagnosis (Rivers, 1920, p. 245). Rivers suggested that war neurosis was a consequence of men consistently having to resist and deny their own anxiety and fear during the war in order to function as soldiers, noting that the fear and dread repressed in the daytime would find release in their nightmares.

Sassoon’s diary entry of April 22nd, 1917 offers an example of Rivers’ testimony and gives an insight into Sassoon’s emotional state.

> ‘I remember […] two mud-stained hands were sticking out of the wet ashen chalky soil […] the dead man was hidden; he was buried; his hideous corpse was screened from the shame of those who lay near him’ (Hart-Davis, 1983, pp. 161).

The following day’s diary entry goes on:

> ‘My brain is screwed up like a tight wire […] when the lights are out […] the horrors come creeping across the floor; the floor is littered with parcels of dead flesh and bones, faces glaring at the ceiling, faces turned to the floor, hands clutching neck or belly; a livid grinning face with a bristly moustache peers at me over the edge of my bed, the hands clutching my sheets. Yet I found no bloodstains there this morning’ (Hart-Davis, 1983, pp. 161-162).

The following month he was described by a friend as being in an ‘abnormal state’ (Hart-Davis, 1983, p. 182).

In the same month as the diary entries above, Sassoon wrote the poem, ‘Death’s Brotherhood’. The extract below offers an insight into Sassoon’s mind at the time, plagued by visual and auditory sensations of horror.

> ‘When I’m asleep, dreaming and drowsed and warm,
> They come, the homeless ones, the noiseless dead.
> […]
> Rumble and drone and bellow overhead,
> Out of the gloom they gather about my bed.
> They whisper to my heart; their thoughts are mine.
> in bitter safety I awake unfriended’ (Hart-Davis, 1983, p. 191).

What emerges from the discussions of shell shock during the war period is an indicative link towards a psychical contribution to shell shock, underpinned by the theme of repressed trauma. Crucially, there is also a denial that shell shock could be equated with hysteria and thus femininity, what further emerges from this discussion around shell shock is its relationship with masculinity.

Elaine Showalter suggests that ‘shell shock was the body language of masculine complaint, a protest against the concept of “manliness” as well as against the war’ (Showalter, Gilman, and Sander et al., 1993, p. 325). Showalter further argues that during WW1, diagnosis of hysteria in the case of a male patient implied emasculation, and that it implied that ‘“you are not a man” […] a sign of weakness, a castration in a word’ (Showalter, 1997, p. 77). Showalter goes on to cite the work of Karl Abraham, who suggested that ‘war neurotics were passive, narcissistic, and impotent men to begin with, whose latent homosexuality was brought to the surface by the all-male environment’ (Abraham, quoted in Showalter, 1997, p. 124). As Micale points out, associating homosexuality with shell shock was routine for doctors, who classified male hysterics as being either an ‘effeminate heterosexual, an overt

homosexual, or a physical or emotional hermaphrodite' (Micale, 2008, p. 200). Commentaries from queer theorists Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1985) and Michael Kimmel (2005) have also alluded to the heterocentric defence involved in avoiding the term 'hysteria' in discussions around shell shock, arguing that this relates to the fear of masculinity appearing as a fragile construct.

George Mosse (1996) identifies the relationship between masculinity and sacrifice at the start of the twentieth century, which developed through the war into emblems of masculinity including violence, endurance, suffering and strength. The idea of the 'heroic warrior' is a concept that Michael Paris (2001) and Graham Dawson (1994) both explore from a historical perspective, tracing the image from the late nineteenth century to the late twentieth. It is an image of the warrior, they both argue, that is perpetuated throughout popular culture. The notion of the warrior is also taken up by Joanna Bourke (1994), from a historical perspective ranging from WW1 to WW2 and the Vietnam War. Bourke (1999) also explores the imagined conception of war and compares this with the actual reality, based upon the idea of a socially sanctioned killing of an enemy that men were forced to enact. She touches upon the psychological conflict that this engendered in soldiers in the form of guilt.

Jessica Meyer's *Men of War* (2009) opens up debates through first-hand accounts found in soldiers' diaries and letters, to show that the ideal image of the war hero exhibiting sacrifice and endurance existed alongside other masculinities of domesticity that challenged the war hero construct. Graham Dawson, writing from a Kleinian perspective, notes that 'masculinities are lived out in the flesh, but fashioned in the imagination' (Dawson, 1994, p. 1). Dawson explores psychical and social identities of military masculinity and reflects upon how the image of men in war is perpetuated through discourses and novels and by historians themselves, reinforcing

the heroic image of the soldier through constructs of phantasy with which males continue to identify. Dawson coins the term ‘the pleasure culture of war’ when undertaking an historical review of the representation of war in British culture between 1850 and 2000, which he identifies as glamorising and romanticising warfare and reproducing the heroic image of the soldier. The cultural production of narratives, he argues, ‘created for the nation’s youth, the over-riding national image of an aggressively militant warrior nation’ (Dawson, 1994, p. 11).

Matt Houlbrook (2003) offers a direct queer reading of masculinity in war and explores the idea of the Guardsman, not only as an emblem of ideal masculinity but also as an object of queer desire. Another critic, Laura Doan (2013), explores the subversion of female gender identities through the examination of case studies of female ambulance drivers and nurses in WW1. Doan’s text challenges historians’ narratives of fixed gender identities during WW1 and the hetero-centric approach that appears to dominate narratives of the Great War. Scholarship on war and masculinity leads to the idea that the War was built and fought upon a foundation of phallocentricism – a privileging of the male in social relations – which perpetuated the ideal image of the war hero as a heterocentric, with an assumed bias towards heterosexuality; a hypermasculine version of the warrior soldier. Mosher and Sirkin (1984) define hypermasculinity as an exaggerated form of masculinity characterised by variables of derogatory attitudes toward women, glorifying violence and viewing danger as thrilling.

In WW1, propaganda played a crucial role in establishing the warrior hero image in the form of posters, which conveyed explicit images of hypermasculinity during the war. The PRC (Parliamentary Recruitment Committee) estimate that 54 million posters and 5.8 million leaflets and pamphlets were issued during the war

period (Simmonds, 2012, p. 47). The London *Times,* in January of 1915, noted the prolific use of posters, writing that they were

> 'in most shop windows, in omnibuses, tramcars, and commercial vans. The great base of Nelson's pillar is covered with them. […] Everywhere, Lord Kitchener sternly points a monstrously big finger, exclaiming: I Want You' (Ginzburg, 2001, pp. 8-9).

Meg Albrinck describes how British propaganda used masculine motifs of courage, honour, and glory in addition to 'shame and coercion to question the virility of the unenlisted man' (Albrinck, 2009, p. 314). Women and children were used to shame men into signing up to the war effort – a tactic tantamount to policing masculinity. One poster stated: 'Women of Britain say GO!'; another, 'Defend your mothers, wives and sisters'. One poster had a small child asking: 'Daddy, what did you do during the war?' Other posters used subtle symbolism evoking the myth of St George and the Dragon in direct reference to heroism, courage and sacrifice. Albrinck adds, 'The posters […] were affecting popular concepts of gender identity. Such arguments shaped individual perceptions of selfhood and identity during the war years and in the post-war years as well' (Albrinck, 2009, p. 336).

As a consequence of the primary importance of masculinity and its links to shell shock, a considerable proportion of this study is dedicated to the exploration of the conflicted masculinity evident in Sassoon's poetry. My aim in establishing the primacy of masculinity in this research is testimony to the inextricable link between the construction of masculinity in war and its subsequent deconstruction, which Sassoon explores through his poetry. I examine the general image of the soldier that was propagated in WW1, which I suggest was an avatar of idealised masculinity that Sassoon aspired towards, as I will show through anecdotes of his life in the war, recorded through diary extracts and complemented with analysis of some of his

poems, with a particular focus on his alter ego, ‘Mad Jack’, discussed later in this dissertation. These aspirations and expectations of achieving the desired status of the war hero resulted in a failure of identification that contributed to Sassoon’s critique on masculinity and the links with shell shock. A brief outline of my argument is detailed in the chapter summaries.

Chapter Summaries

Considering the suggested links between shell shock and childhood conflicts (Jones 1918; MacCurdy, 1918; White, 1919; McDougall, 1920; Rivers, 1932), I contextualise this research within the framework of the Oedipus complex. In Chapter One, 'The Evolution of Freud's Formulation of the Oedipus Complex', I begin with a critical overview of Freud's development of the concept. This outlines the Oedipus complex and provides grounding for later arguments in the rest of this chapter and the subsequent chapters. Considering the evolution of Freud's formulation of the Oedipus complex also allows for an exploration of patriarchal culture, which arguably influenced Freud's thinking and led to what I suggest is a heterocentric model of gender and sexuality. Furthermore, later discussions of Sassoon's social criticism of the war are based on the premise of the Oedipus complex from a Lacanian perspective, from which I show how the construction of the ideal war image of masculinity was based upon the premise of a phallocentric society.

In Chapter Two, 'The Return of Oedipal Repressions in the Theatre of War', I consider the existing research into how soldiers often expressed trauma through regression to a childlike stage, as mentioned in this Introduction. The question I address in the second chapter is: 'To what extent did Sassoon's conflicted state in the war reside in unresolved Oedipal conflicts?' The crux of my argument is that the pressure to perform in the hypermasculine area of war resulted in emerging emotional conflict for Sassoon. I suggest that his diagnosis of shell shock did not manifest in a physical way but did so psychically, and I propose that the conflicts expressed in his poetry were manifestations of previously repressed Oedipal conflicts, triggered by the war. Therefore, the war acted as a site of *Nachträglichkeit*, allowing repressed trauma from the past to reappear (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973). I conceptualise my arguments throughout this chapter from a Freudian perspective. I begin with a brief

overview of Sassoon's childhood to assess its influences and the formation of his super-ego, which I suggest influenced his gender identity; Sassoon works through his past Oedipal trauma using a strategy of establishing a narratorial position in his poetry as either actor or spectator. I suggest that when Sassoon positions himself as actor, this allows him to abreact and release repressed emotion through acting out past Oedipal phantasies, and as the spectator, he can reflect on his present performance as a soldier.

Sassoon's dual perspective allows him to work through both his past Oedipal trauma and the present trauma of the war. His present trauma in the war is further explored through the intersection of gender and sexuality. Following Leys' argument (2010) of the notion of a splitting ego, and Freud's notions of the peace ego and the war ego (1921), I suggest that there was a split in Sassoon's ego. I posit that the splitting of the ego, for Sassoon, was a result of the demands of the heterocentric, hypermasculine soldier role that he was expected to perform, set against his homosexuality and emerging disillusionment with the war. This emotional conflict manifests in Sassoon's poetry through castration anxieties, which are implicitly related to feelings of inferiority and the fear of not achieving the desired warrior status that he strived for. I utilise Houlbrook's ideas about the soldier as an object of sexual desire (2003) and suggest that Sassoon, again through Oedipal phantasies, sublimates homosexual desires in his poetry – those that challenged the heterocentric construct of the warrior image of the soldier. However, Sassoon's challenge to the construct of the soldier was at this point largely driven by guilt and working through his conflicts. In the final part of this chapter I approach Bourke's argument (1999) regarding the psychical consequences of forcing soldiers into a position of culturally sanctioned killing, but from a different vantage point: by positioning my argument from the

perspective of Oedipal conflicts. Killing for war, as a socially sanctioned act, becomes for Sassoon an act of atonement for past Oedipal guilt, which fuses with his present guilt, leading to feelings of failure in achieving the desired masculinity propagated by the war.

In Chapter Three, 'Desiring and Failing Masculinities', I go on to show how the atrocities of war are explored through a social lens in Sassoon's poetry, this time utilising a Lacanian perspective. In this part of the study, the question I address is, 'How did Sassoon respond to the hypermasculine image of the soldier in his poetry?' I build on Dawson's argument of the cultural reproduction of the warrior image (1994) by exploring in more detail the social presentations of masculinity. I extend Bourke (1994) and Meyers' (2009) exploration of alternative masculinities that presented throughout the war by showing that Sassoon's poetry did more than present an alternative view of masculinity; rather, his experience of being on the front line presented a subversion of the image of the male warrior in his poetry. Violence, courage and sacrifice were replaced with rebellious notions of pacifism, fear and disillusionment. Once again, this chapter begins with the Oedipus complex from Lacan's perspective. This also enables key concepts to be introduced to analyse Sassoon's poetry from the perspective of the notions of lack, *jouissance,* desire, and the Other, each of which are explored in this chapter in relation to Sassoon's poetry. The Lacanian perspective of Sassoon's work is complemented with Julia Kristeva's work on abjection, which I identify in Sassoon's poetry. I conclude with an exploration of how Sassoon's poetry offers graphic, emotionally compounded depictions of shell-shocked soldiers, which result in descriptions of masculinity as abject.

Chapter One: The Evolution of Freud's Formulation of the Oedipus Complex

This chapter begins with a critical review of Freud's development of the Oedipal phase, utilising the historical, chronological dates given by Simon Blatt and Rachel Blass (Neu, 1994, p. 161-170). This chapter will be interspersed with points of contemporary relevance through Hans Loewald's contemporary perspective on the Oedipus complex (2000). The historical overview and critique serve several purposes: firstly, the critique explains the Oedipus complex and its core themes, which are crucial to this thesis, particularly the second chapter, as I propose that the conflicts expressed in Sassoon's poetry all stem from unresolved Oedipal conflicts; in Chapter Three, I continue with the idea of the Oedipus complex from a Lacanian perspective. Secondly, reviewing Freud's development of the Oedipus complex offers space to give an overview of other analysts' criticisms – particularly feminist critiques. A feminist critique is important in that it highlights Freud's phallocentric thinking and also sets a firm context for later discussions of gender and sexuality in Sassoon's poetry, which are the underpinning themes of this dissertation. The concluding part of this chapter ends with an example of the Oedipus complex through Freud's case study of 'Little Hans' (1909).

Freud first acknowledged the Oedipus complex in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess in 1897, regarding it as a universal event in human psycho-sexual development. Freud's formulation of the complex was a continual evolution of thought through the years from 1897 to 1938. Between 1897 and 1909, Freud focused on the child's love for their mother and rivalry with their father – who at this stage performed an auxiliary role. Here, Freud emphasised the child's love and affection towards the father. Following this period, in 1910 and 1911, Freud began to crystallise the Oedipal constellation, with the father becoming a central figure.

Freud's next stage in the formulation of the Oedipus complex was presented in *Totem and Taboo* (1913), where he presented the universality of the complex. At this stage, the father complex, identified as one aspect of the Oedipus complex, becomes apparent and shifts from being contained in the nuclear family to a model that is mirrored in cultural institutions, religion, and morals. Freud illustrates how patriarchal culture is produced based on the central figure of the totem – an animal which serves as a creast representing a social group which, he adds, is also a substitute for both a primordial and biological father. Freud discusses the totem meal, in which a group of brothers kill the father, who had forbidden access to the women of society; so that they too could have access to the women, the brothers then eat him. Freud adds that 'in the act of devouring him they [the brothers] accomplished their identification with him, and each one of them acquired a portion of his strength' (Freud, 1913, p. 142). However, the guilt of killing their father is internalised by the brothers, which then forms a component of the Oedipus complex: "the basis for the development of a sense of guilt that restrains the hostile and incestuous impulses" (Freud, 1913, p. 164). In the description of the killing of the totem father, Freud cements the concepts of parricide and incestuous prohibition, as two repressed wishes that are retained in the unconsciousness after the resolution of the Oedipus complex.

In the next stage of Freud's formulation of the Oedipus complex, between 1914 and 1918, he focuses on instinctual and incestuous wishes. There is a shift in this period away from the affectionate father and son dynamic, as Freud notes the incestuous wishes towards the father, which form the basis of an introduction toward the negative Oedipal complex. It is in this stage that a split between Freud and Carl Jung becomes apparent, as Jung challenged the idea that repressed sexual desires in childhood could result in neuroses, instead suggesting that while adult neuroses

may be a consequence of past conflicts, they were not necessarily sexual (Snowden, 2010). In one sweeping blow, in *On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement* (1914), Freud criticises both Jung and Adler:

> ‘The Oedipus-complex, we are told, has only a "symbolical" sense, the mother therein representing the unattainable which must be renounced in the interests of cultural development. The father who is killed in the Oedipus myth represents the "inner" father […] Thus a new religio-ethical system was founded which, exactly like Adler's, was obliged to give new interpretations, to distort or set aside the actual results of analysis’ (Freud, 1914, p. 61).

It is tempting to consider Freud’s denunciations as subliminal projections of his fears of gaps in his work. Freud’s final line offers an ironic suggestive reference to Adler’s theory on masculine protest and an indicative reference to the prized status of masculinity: ‘men are strong so long as they represent a strong idea. They become powerless when they oppose it’ (Freud, 1914, p. 66). It is clear at this stage that Freud’s evolving ideas on the Oedipus complex were not the only things at risk of being undermined – his status was also being undermined. Freud begins to represent a symbolic figure, reminiscent of the totem father, under the threat of toppling from his post as the father of psychoanalysis. He therefore strives to protect his work and potential legacy by dismissing competing, yet arguably complementary work.

Freud’s defence came at a time when the emergence of a relational perspective began to appear, which offered counter-arguments to his instinctual and driven approach with a focus on interpersonal relationships. This further added to the split in the psychoanalytic movement. Otto Rank’s *Birth Trauma* (1924) suggested a prenatal trauma as being more important than subsequent traumas and fantasies (1993). Rank’s proposition effectively undermined Freud's underpinning notions of the Oedipus complex: the father's function, castration, and repression.

Loewald, in his paper ‘The Waning of the Oedipal Complex’ (2000), offers a contemporary reinterpretation which is of relevance to the complex. He defines parricide, noting that this crime committed toward a parent who has nurtured the child ‘involves a revolt against parental authority.’ It is not from fear of castration, according to Loewald, but driven by an ‘active urge for emancipation’ from the parents who are ‘actively rejected, fought against, and destroyed, to varying degrees’ (2000). Loewald suggests that Oedipal parricide does not require repression; he calls it a ‘passionate appropriation of what is experienced as loveable and admirable in parents’; the fantasised death of the father is ‘collateral damage and part of [the] child’s struggle for independence and individuation’ (2000). Adler, Jung, Ferenczi and Rank can be considered as substitute children of the Oedipal father, each motivated by a desire to discover but subsequently immersed in the crisis between leaving and staying with the symbolic parent, situated here as Freud. In Rank’s case, he fails in his separation, indicating fears of abandonment. This is illustrated by his eventual rejection of Adler and deference to Freud – the symbolic father.

Loewald goes on to say that, ‘in our role as children of our parents, by genuine emancipation we do kill something vital in them – not all in one blow and not in all respects but contributing to their dying’ (Loewald, 2000, p. 244). Adler, Jung and to some degree Rank each achieved this in various ways with Freud, but crucially it was Freud who resisted the passing of the mantle by dismissing the theories of those who were once his followers. Freud could not or refused to accept them, and thus symbolically resisted his status as the metaphorical father and further resisted his implicit symbolic and fantasised Oedipal murder by the sons. What is salient in this reading is the centrality of power dynamics between men, with the central source being the symbolic father figure.

Luce Irigaray. although not directly referencing Freud's totem, infers the mythical foundation on which patriarchy is sustained, noting the existence of 'imaginary landscapes, which over time become known as law, and which identify the structures of a dominant socio-symbolic system shaped by men' (Irigaray, 1988, p. 159). Irigaray suggests that Freud's interpretation of the totem father celebrates patriarchy over matriarchy:

> 'When Freud describes and theorises about the murder of the father as the founding act for the primal horde, he is forgetting an even more ancient murder, that of the woman-mother, which was necessary to the foundation of a specific order in the city' (Irigaray, 1993, p. 11).

A further feminist perspective of the complex is offered by Juliet Mitchell, who acknowledges that the 'internalisation of the father solidifies the patriarchal pact between father and son' (Mitchell and Rose, 1982, p. 394). I would go further than Mitchell and suggest that from a wider perspective, the status of man is also cemented as a symbolic figure of power and authority, as the dead father ironically becomes more powerful in death; this process sets up a continued submission to the father. The father thus symbolically cements the status and authority of men, which sustains a patriarchal society.

The primacy of the male and the social implications of the Oedipus complex are also established by Lacan, who offers a reworking and a critique of the complex, reformulating it as a symbolic structure in *Seminar V* (1957-1958). This revision of the complex will be explored fully in Chapter Three. However, prior to reworking the complex, Lacan pointed out salient aspects of Freud's Oedipus complex with an emphasis on the father from Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1913). Lacan brings attention to the: the No of the Father/Name of the Father. Lacan points out that in Freud's account of the primal horde, it is the Father, who is set as the dominant figure of the

law. ‘The primordial Law is therefore the Law which, in regulating marriage ties, superimposes the reign of culture over the reign of nature’ (Lacan, 2006, p. 277). This is a clear inference on the social construction of patriarchy and furthermore the establishment of gender hierarchy favouring the male. Considering the Freudian totem story, the fact that the object-choice of the sons are women also posits a grounding of a culturally accepted heterocentricism – the belief that everyone is heterosexual. As Lacan explains, ‘The very normalization of this maturation is henceforth dependent in man on cultural intervention, as is exemplified by the fact that sexual object-choice is dependent upon the Oedipus complex’ (Lacan, 2006, p. 98). Lacan infers the heteronormative basis of desire, noting that it has an historical basis, which he refers to as accidental, thereby suggesting the instability and cultural elements that are needed to sustain heteronormativity, based on Freud’s totemism, which we have inherited and appropriated and continue to live with. Lacan’s perspective offers an oblique critique of the phallocentric basis of Freud’s totemism and the socio-cultural implications of Freud’s ideas.

What is clear so far is that women are largely ignored by Freud; the primacy of the male has been established as paramount. However, Freud’s theory on the pre-Oedipal stage was formulated in his 1925 paper ‘Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes’. The work outlines the female Oedipus complex, which would later be developed in the 1931 paper ‘Female Sexuality’. Nevertheless, as I will go on to show throughout the rest of this chapter, Freud’s phallocentric perspective is retained.

In his 1925 paper, Freud offers three arguments in defence of ‘penis envy’. Firstly, regarding jealousy, he writes, ‘She makes her judgement and her decision in a flash. She has seen it and knows that she is without it and wants to have it’ (p. 252).

Secondly, on inferiority: ‘there is another surprising effect of penis-envy, or of the discovery of the inferiority of the clitoris, which is undoubtedly the most important of all’ (Freud, 1925, p. 255). ‘A third consequence of penis-envy seems to be a loosening of the girl’s relation with her mother as a love-object. [...] in the end, the girl’s mother, who sent her into the world so insufficiently equipped, is always held responsible for her lack of a penis’ (Freud, 1925, p. 254). As Nancy Chodorow points out, ‘Freud does not seek to find the source of penis envy in previous individual history; that is, he does not explain why females want a penis. He simply argues that “she sees one and she knows she wants one”’ (Chodorow, 1989, p. 173). In a leap of assumption from Freud, the girl is described as directing attention to the father, and the desire for a penis is substituted by the desire to have a baby – a state which will be perpetual for the girl in question.

Karen Horney refuted Freud’s ideas that the girl was envious of the penis and instead, in line with Adler’s social perspective, noted that men, unable to conceive children, compensate for this by succeeding in other realms, countering Freud’s penis envy with womb envy (1967). Horney’s ideas would be taken up much later by Simone de Beauvoir, who suggests that ‘If women envy men, it is because of the social power and privilege they enjoy, and not because of anatomical superiority’ (de Beauvoir, 1989, p. 52). De Beauvoir suggests that sexual difference is conflated with male perspective, which leads to sexual monism. Her ideas are further echoed by Irigaray, who stipulates that Freud reduces sexual difference into monism, which leads to ‘the problematics of sameness’ (Irigaray 1985, p. 26).

In *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985), Irigaray addresses Freud’s statement that ‘the little girl is a little man’ (Freud, 1933, p. 118). Irigaray goes on to add that, ‘the little girl uses, with the same intent [as the boy], her still smaller clitoris… a penis

equivalent' (Irigaray, 1985, p. 25). Here, Irigaray reduces the sexual difference to sameness, thus dissolving the concept of the Other. Irigaray highlights that 'after a "normal" resolution of the Oedipus complex, the little girl must give up her active/clitoral sexuality for reproductive passivity in a heteronormative society' – a 'hole-envelope that serves to sheathe and massage the penis in intercourse' (Irigaray, 1985, p. 23). Irigaray's perspective highlights the oppositional duality of active and passive regarding masculinity and femininity. Irigaray's heterosexual intercourse analogy is not only a nod to biological difference but shields a metaphor for a collapse of unequal gender relations. The image of the Freudian desired penis is one that the woman already has – the clitoris. However, the clitoris is denied and the female is reduced to desiring the male penis. Irigaray's suggestion that the penis is 'sheathed' and 'massaged' – that it is protected and manipulated – suggests that it is only erect (that is, symbolically functional) in a heterocentric society through the role of women. Irigaray's argument of sameness has now become one of difference and is dependent upon women defining men. The penis gains a metaphorical status of power through the unequal relationship between men and women. The whole argument pivots upon the castration complex, which further rests upon Freud's implicit privileged status of the penis.

Between 1919 and 1926, Freud's development of the complete Oedipus complex was consolidated, comprising a simultaneous presence of both a positive and a negative complex. Freud's notion of the 'constitutional bisexuality of all human beings' (Freud, 1925, p. 38) allows for the potential to pursue either the positive or negative Oedipal path, as he notes that the sexual drive has no predetermined object-choice for discharge. The dissolution of the Oedipal conflict is achieved through the dynamic of identification when the castration complex is instigated. The male child:

> ‘has a view of the genital region of a little girl and cannot help being convinced of the absence of a penis in a creature who is so like himself. With this, the loss of his own penis becomes imaginable, and the threat of castration takes its deferred effect’ (Freud, 1924, p. 176).

Fundamentally, the child believes that his penis, like the girl’s, will be cut off by his rival father as a punishment for desiring the mother. Castration anxiety drives the boy to abandon his desire for the mother and instead identify with the father; he then models his father’s gender with the aim of becoming like his father so that he may one day *have* the mother in the form of another woman. As in *Totem and Taboo*, women are transactional figures in the boy’s complex. The opposite process of identification would, according to Freud, follow with girls identifying with the mother. In the negative Oedipal complex, the reverse happens with boys desiring the father and the girl desiring the mother. As Neu states, ‘It is in this way that boy’s incestuous feelings toward the father […] which, in the re-examination of bisexuality […] discovered in a dyad, are transmuted into a triadic relationship’ (1991, p. 167).

Freud would later use the mythical image of Medusa as an analogy of the male child seeing the castrated female:

> ‘The terror of Medusa is thus a terror of castration that is linked to the sight of something […] when a boy, who has hitherto been unwilling to believe the threat of castration, catches sight of the female genitals, probably those of an adult, surrounded by hair, and essentially those of the mother’ (Freud, 1922, p. 273).

In Freud’s description, it evokes fear of the missing penis and a horror of absence associated with the female. Considering the mythical Medusa, we are impelled to look away; Medusa is conceived as being a fearful, abject, monstrous woman. Instead, in the Oedipal paradigm, it is the father who is presented as whole and a signifier of authority to the child, who must accept the prohibition of the father, motivated by the fear of potential symbolical castration. There is an irony in Freud’s

choice of mythological figure, as Medusa has more phallic symbols on her head than the solitary penis that men are so afraid of losing. Hélène Cixous subverts Freud's Medusa: 'You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing' (Cixous et al., 1976, p. 885). Cixous' writing on Medusa centres on the power difference between having and lacking a penis, noting that when you 'censor the body, you censor the breath and speech at the same time' (Cixous, 1976, p. 880). The idea of censorship is clear in the image of the woman lacking a penis, and further implicit in Cixous' statement is the repression of the female in a patriarchal context. Considering that the penis is a signifier of power and dominance, in a Freudian context, women must therefore be submissive to men. With this perspective in mind, there follows, in this particular reading from Cixous and Irigaray, a chain of continued signifiers of oppositional binaries based on man/woman versus active/passive. The fundamental issue is that the lower binary (i.e. women) is always associated with some form of 'lack' and challenges the inherent, dominant, hierarchical and patriarchal binaries. The opposition of binaries not only denigrates women but also puts considerable pressure on men to perform in a guise of active dominance.

The view that Freud's writing comes from a phallocentric perspective ultimately suggests that he prescribes to the interests of patriarchy with the inference of the privileging of the penis, posited as a signifier of power and privilege. Phallocentricism is demonstrated through the fear of the loss of the penis for boys and the desire of the penis for girls, which leads to the idea that it is the status it offers rather than the penis itself that is central. Juliet Mitchell, however, points out that 'psychoanalysis is not a recommendation *for* a patriarchal society, but an analysis *of* one' (Mitchell, 1975, p. 13). Mitchell adds in the introduction to *Female Sexuality* (1982) that: 'Freud always

insisted that it was the presence or absence of the phallus and nothing else that marked the distinction between the sexes' (p. 6). Freud does acknowledge the difference between the sexes when he states the following:

> 'the biological fact of the duality of the sexes: it is an ultimate fact for our knowledge; it defies every attempt to trace it back to something else. Psychoanalysis has contributed nothing to clearing up this problem, which falls wholly within the province of biology' (Freud, 1940, p. 63).

Freud also noted in his chapter 'Transformations of Puberty' that masculinity and femininity are respectively associated with 'activity/passivity, sometimes in a biological and sometimes again in a sociological sense' (1905, p. 141). Freud adds that there are masculine and feminine traits in society, although he adds that there are no truly masculine or feminine people – a clear nod to the social construction of gender. Mitchell also brings attention to the idea that Freud's masculine and feminine terms were merely convenient for him and should not be read prescriptively (1975, p. 115).

Mitchell and Rose offer arguments in defence of the idea that Freud's thinking was phallocentric and suggest the limitations inherent in interpreting Freud on either a prescriptive or descriptive basis. Mitchell argues in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis* that 'psychoanalysis does not describe what a woman is – far less what she should be; it can only try to comprehend how psychological femininity comes about' (Mitchell, 1975, p. 338). While Mitchell's 'psychological femininity' view may be valid, it does not diminish the idea that it is the Oedipus complex, specifically the castration complex, that designates woman as other in material terms – that is, in a social context, as before the castration complex there are no differences other than the obvious visual ones. Rose suggests, in *Sexuality in the Field of Vision,* that by reading Freud as purely descriptive or prescriptive there is no room for women to change the patriarchy,

and that reading Freud as descriptive is further problematic in that it limits interpretation (Rose, 1986, p. 92). Still, when Freud explains his understanding of psychical development and the castration complex, even if read non-descriptively or prescriptively, the female, it would seem to Freud, can only escape the category of other by desiring to be the same as the male, i.e. having a penis. Sexual difference in this reading is reduced to sameness, which brings the argument back to Irigaray's conception of the 'girl as a little man' (Irigaray, 1985, p. 25). It is an inherent patriarchal social privilege bestowed on the penis that is the issue, which the Oedipus complex does nothing to eradicate – in fact, it does quite the opposite and reproduces patriarchy.

For Freud, the castration complex leads to the dissolution of the Oedipus complex and the formation of the super-ego, the heir of the Oedipus complex, which further serves to repress the complex (Freud, 1933, p. 129). The super-ego also serves as a critical function in terms of prohibitions and inhibitions due to the internalisation of either the male's parents' or significant others' moral standards, which serves to control aggressive and other socially unacceptable impulses. Any transgression from societal norms results in feelings of guilt and/or anxiety, with the corresponding desire for reparation. Freud suggests that only the parents influence the formation of the superego: 'The installation of the super-ego can be described as a successful instance of identification with the parental agency, a child's super-ego is in fact constructed on the model, not of its parents, but of its parents' super-ego' (Freud, 1933, p. 67). However, the super-ego is identified as only one part of a structure, the other being the ego-ideal. In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), Freud states that another significant person can stand in as a substitute for their ego-ideal.

Freud goes on to discuss the collective process in the formation of the ego-ideal, which transcends parental internalisation. ‘Each individual is a component part of numerous groups, he is bound by ties of identification in many directions, and he has built up his ego-ideal on the most various models’ (Freud, 1921, p. 129). Laplanche points towards one critic to understand the difference between the two terms with another analyst’s definition.

> ‘Daniel Lagache speaks of a super-ego/ego-ideal system, positing a structural relationship enclosed within this system: “the super-ego corresponds to authority and the ego-ideal to the way in which the subject must behave in order to respond to the expectations of authority”’ (Laplanche, 1973, p.145).

So, from Lagache’s perspective, the ego-ideal and the super-ego form a system of two parts: acceptance of authority and submission to the expected types of behaviour related to that authority. The multitude of influences on the super-ego is a notion which becomes particularly relevant for readings of Sassoon’s poetry regarding a discussion of masculinity, presented in Chapter Two.

Loewald (2000) suggests that the Oedipus complex is not ‘demolished’ but is continually in a state of transformation in the ‘troubling but rewarding richness of life’ (p. 246). The Oedipus complex is only diminished by the fact that the Oedipal relationships with one’s parents no longer restrain the subject consciously or unconsciously as a perennial child. I would add to Loewald’s notion that it is also the legacy of the symbolic power associated with the penis that is also never destroyed, which contributes to the ‘troubling […] richness of life’ (Loewald, 2000, p. 246). Women continue to be defined by their male counterparts, and men, in turn, continue to live under the pressure of the power of the phallus, notably in terms of conforming to a specific gendered role, as will become clear in my discussion of Sassoon’s poetry later in this chapter. Loewald goes on to describe the super-ego and its formation, including

the ‘internalisation’ of or ‘identification’ with the Oedipal parents. The introjection of the parental figure is adapted to individuals, and as Loewald shows, it is also ‘transmuted’. This in turn contributes to the formation of the super-ego, the transmutation constituting an atonement for parricide. The legacy of the father is then carried on in the formation of a new legacy, and the father is in effect immortalised and superseded yet only in that he is transformed in the internalising process within the child.

A summary of Freud’s Oedipus complex is exemplified in his case study of ‘Little Hans’ (1909). Little Hans had a phobia that a horse, which he insisted had a ‘big widdler’, would bite him. Freud interpreted this as a fear of the father, even though Hans linked it to the mother, with his curious insistence on the fact that his mother did not have a ‘big widdler’. Freud goes on to describe how the scenario between Hans and his mother reflects the Oedipal wish to be with the mother. Freud also infers that Hans wanted to be in his mother’s bed and to have babies like her – a concept implying sex with the father. The evidence given points toward an inverse Oedipal complex involving identification with the mother, which implies a wish for castration, or to be like the mother, as occurs within the negative complex as seen in Freud’s ‘The Ego and the Id’ (1923) and other papers (1924; 1930). Despite the evidence, Freud rejected the inverse Oedipal interpretation and instead concluded that the boy feared that his father would castrate him for his desires towards the mother. It does seem that at this point, Freud forces an interpretation of the so-called positive Oedipal complex. He later goes on to suggest that the horse in Little Hans’ phobia was symbolic of the father. Being bitten by the horse, furthermore, was interpreted as being symbolic of the father castrating him for his incestuous desires. Freud’s insistence on prioritising the role of the father and ignoring the potential that there may have been a castration wish alludes to the idea of the primacy of hetero-masculinity, which suggests that

masculinity is an unstable construct, stabilised through prioritisation over femininity, through the mother. The stabilisation of masculinity is inferred here. It is reminiscent of Irigaray's argument in the analogy of heterosexual intercourse discussed earlier that women are used as the other, to define men and masculinity, in a heteronormative patriarchal society. In prioritising the father and ignoring the mother, Freud ignores the idea that Little Hans could conceivably have had a castration wish. This clearly leads him to a phallocentric-driven conclusion, reaching heteronormative masculine diagnoses of Hans' Oedipus complex.

Nancy Chodorow, Melanie Klein, Dorothy Dinnerstein, and Julia Kristeva each offer perspectives on the maternal figure that further highlight Freud's perspective of the maternal as depicted in the Little Hans case study. Chodorow argues that rejection of the mother in the Oedipal stage contributes to the oppression of women, noting males enter adulthood with feelings of rejection retained (Chodorow, 1978). Klein points towards the love-hate relationship against the mother from the child, this stems from the child's first attachment to the mother's breast, which the child identifies as either good, when feeding and satisfying its needs, or bad when not being able to feed (Klein, 2002). Dinnerstein proposes that because women and mothers are traditionally primary childcare providers, they are perceived as controlling figures in childhood, and later as scapegoats by men in adulthood, because– if it goes wrong it is the mother's fault (Dinnerstein, 1976). Kristeva suggests that the separation of the child from the mother at birth is an example of abjection, casting out the maternal figure (Kristeva, 1982). I would suggest that each critic's interpretation of the maternal is as much about the feminine as it is about the mother. The rejection of the feminine as a means of prioritising masculinity is a point that I reference throughout Chapter Two and consider more fully in Chapter Three from a Kristevan perspective.

In conclusion, the chronological historical perspective of the Oedipus complex, alongside Loewald's contemporary understanding and feminist criticism, serves several purposes in relation to Sassoon's poetry. Firstly, it outlines the main themes of the complex and refers to the discussions of the split in the psychoanalytic movement that challenged Freud's legacy, which he and his followers adamantly protected, and from which Oedipal conflicts were subliminally projected, with Freud substituted as the Oedipal father. Sassoon's poetry is also a site of sublimated and projected Oedipal conflicts, which echo Loewald's stance that the Oedipus complex is never truly demolished.

Secondly, the split in the psychoanalytic movement is mirrored in a symbolic split within Sassoon between the soldier and the poet: between the homosexual soldier, performing in the hetero-centric, hypermasculine arena of war, and the poet, resisting this and sublimating his desires. The split in the psychoanalytic community is also symbolically manifested in the splitting of the ego, which will be illustrated later in this chapter.

Thirdly, the historical perspective of the Oedipus complex highlights Freud's phallocentric thinking. Freud's writing is an indication of the patriarchal culture in which it was written – the same culture in which Sassoon's poetry was also produced. Societal context would have had implications for Sassoon's writing as a homosexual man who was compelled to sublimate his desires in his poetry.

Fourthly, in light of the formation and subsequent transmutation of the super-ego with the legacy of the father carrying on, Sassoon through his poetry attempts a reconsideration of the legacy, posed by patriarchal masculinity, of the hypermasculine male, just as Freud's dissidents attempted to develop his work. Finally, the idea that in Freud's thinking, gender identification is based on the threat of castration hinges

upon a heteronormative masculine foundation, which is precisely the premise that contributes to Sassoon's conflicts. The premise of patriarchal society and the complex relationship it holds with masculinity is paramount to this study and is explored throughout this work and further highlighted in the conclusion of this study. I will now however, go on to show in Chapter Two, how Sassoon's poetry reflects a resistance to phallocentricism, conceptualised through Oedipal conflicts.

Chapter Two: Sassoon's Psychical War

The Return of Oedipal Repressions in the Theatre of War

> 'Dark, dark! The horror of darkness, like a shroud,
> Wraps me and bears me on through mist and cloud.
> Ah me, ah me! What spasms athwart me shoot,
> What pangs of agonizing memory?'
> (Sophocles, 2011, p. 71).

Oedipus's horror upon realising that he has killed his father and slept with his mother echoes essential Oedipal-related themes that are relevant to the discussion of this chapter. I will explore each of the Oedipal themes mentioned above, conceptualised with reference to the concept of *Nachträglichkeit*, whereby past traumatic events previously repressed are reactivated in the present. The themes of violence, memory, guilt, and the crisis of identity are all sublimated by Sassoon in his war poetry, published between 1915 and 1918. The argument that I propose in this part of the chapter is that the pressure on Sassoon to perform a designated hypermasculinity triggered his Oedipal conflicts. The war acted as the site where these conflicts were abreacted with previously repressed emotions from the past emotionally released in the present.

I contextualise this chapter with details on Sassoon's childhood, with a focus on the formation of the super-ego, and how this contributed to a conflicted sense of gender identity. I go on to explore how Sassoon's poems can be read as narratives that are positioned from a dual narratorial perspective of actor or spectator. From the perspective of spectator, this allows Sassoon to observe his own performance in the war in the role of a poet; this is complemented by his status of solider positioned as actor.

The dual roles are conceptualised through Freud's theory of theatre, explained in ‘Psychopathic Characters on the Stage’ (1960). The duality of actor and spectator further indicates a split in Sassoon, which, I go on to suggest, reflects the splitting of the ego. The split ego works as a defence for Sassoon in that through his dual position he can project Oedipal castration anxieties, and sublimation of his prohibited homosexual desires. I suggest that in Sassoon’s poetry, through the abreaction of Oedipal conflicts, conflicted feelings about his own gender and sexuality emerge, which lead to a subversive resistance against the heterocentric, hypermasculine construct that the war demanded from the soldier.

Sassoon’s childhood reflects the classic Freudian Oedipal framework with both mother and father until the age of four when his parents began to separate, with his father visiting only on weekends. Sassoon refers to the separation with some anxiety: ‘I wanted to enjoy my parents simultaneously – not alternately’ (Moorcroft-Wilson, 2013, p. 20). Subsequently, Sassoon’s father died when he was nine years old. There is no written evidence of Sassoon mourning his father, so this can only be assumed. Sassoon’s models of identification leading up to his parents’ separation and shortly after his father’s death included female figures. He was close to his nanny, who left following Sassoon’s father’s death, and was replaced by two successive female tutors: Miss Batty, who became his ‘devoted slave’ (Moorcroft-Wilson, p. 31), and then Fraulein Story. Sassoon was to spend most of his childhood, and quite a lot of his adulthood, ‘setting up substitute father-figures, reacting to the predominantly female world to which his father had abandoned him’ (Moorcroft-Wilson, 2013, p. 71).

These female influences in Sassoon’s life were disrupted by his first male tutor, whom Sassoon described as being ‘by no means aggressively masculine, rather the “mildest of men”’ (Sassoon, 1928, p. 10). At the age of four, another model of

masculinity was introduced to Sassoon in the form of his tutor George Richardson, who extended Sassoon's education to the sports of horse riding, hunting, and cricket, consequently leading Sassoon into an exclusively male environment. Later, at the age of twelve, Sassoon acquired another male tutor, Mr Hamilton, described by Sassoon as being a believer in 'Muscular Christianity'. This was a movement 'characterised by a belief in patriotic duty, manliness, the moral and physical beauty of athleticism, teamwork, discipline, self-sacrifice, and the expulsion of all that is effeminate' (Newsome, 1961, p. 216). Masculine pursuits, such as the sports curriculum, were in contrast to the prohibition of less masculine pursuits such as writing poetry, which Sassoon did as a child; he noted that his male tutors made him 'feel [that] writing poetry was unmanly' (Moorcroft-Wilson, 2013, p. 46). The prohibition issued to Sassoon suggests a symbolic threat of castration – a clear reference to Cixous's Medusa, discussed earlier as an indirect instruction of the male to repress the feminine. So, even from such an early age, Sassoon's identity conflict was apparent: the conflict between the poet self, perceived as feminine, and encouraged to be repressed, set against the image of Muscular Christianity.

Both Sassoon's parents and tutors would have internalised their own figures of identification, and in this case, the historical, social context of the period becomes very important to consider as this would have had an impact on Sassoon, and, as is of particular relevance to this study, also contributed to his gender identity. Despite the rise of first-wave feminism with the New Woman, Edwardian gender roles were still largely based on prevalent stereotypical beliefs from the Victorian period, denoting private and public spheres for women and men respectively. The image of the late Victorian woman can be seen in the infamous poem 'The Angel in the House' (1862) by Coventry Patmore, in which Patmore portrays an image of his wife as a model for

all women, signified as a figure of domesticity who lives at home and attends to domestic affairs. The ideal woman, according to Patmore, is: 'passive and powerless, meek, charming, graceful, sympathetic, self-sacrificing, pious' (Gonçalves de Abreu, 2014, p. 108). Evidence of the endurance of this perception of women beyond the early nineteenth century is reflected in Virginia Woolf's reference to the 'Angel' in *Professions for Women*. 'It was she […] so tormented me that at last I killed her' (Woolf, 1931). Alternatively for men, they were discouraged from displays of emotion and passivity which were perceived as effeminate (Carle, Shaw and Shaw, 2018). Before the war, Sassoon had spent his life as a cross between the archetypal image of the late Victorian woman and the archetypal late Edwardian gentleman, attending lunches with friends, visiting the opera, writing poetry, riding horses, playing cricket, and living on an allowance from his mother. It is in this divisive social culture that Sassoon's psychical conflict emerges and manifests in his writing, which I conceptualise as being the foundation for Sassoon's split identity of poet and soldier.

Sassoon's tutors and dead father would all have been influenced by the divisive gender constructs outlined above and would have passed these perspectives on to the young boy. The significant people in Sassoon's life would have contributed to Sassoon's psychical self, through the super-ego, the internalisation of cultural rules, and the ideal ego, with the conscious and unconscious images of his ideal self, informed by the super-ego, each producing a model of masculinity for Sassoon to inherit and introject. The masculine model of identification would have been compounded by the hypermasculine environment of the war, with the construct of the warrior-hero set against Sassoon's other identifications of the ego-ideal and super-ego in his socialisation with the predominant feminine influences in his life – his female tutors and his mother. Sassoon's writing offers him a detached temporal perspective

as both poet and spectator. This in turn allows him to reflect on these identities and on the awareness of the incongruence within himself and, consequently, to reflect on the emerging awareness of his performance as a soldier as an act. Sassoon as a poet is self-observing, the ego continually assessing his performance in the war against the ideal of the soldier. The super-ego brings to attention his failings in meeting the model of the ideal self, which leads to guilt and inferiority. The only reason that this scenario is played out is due to the further split in Sassoon, who positions himself as both an actor and a spectator.

Freud (1960) comments on the dynamic of actor and spectator in theatre and the cathartic effect of drama, describing it as a method to ‘excite pity and fear, and thus bring about a catharsis of the emotions. The actor enables a release of the subject’s own affects […] concomitant sexual stimulation […] a by-product of every emotional excitation' (Freud, 1960, p. 144). The spectator can live vicariously through the drama to release their own suppressed desires. Sassoon as spectator often describes scenes as a passive observer. At other times, Sassoon is the catalyst of the drama, the actor directly placed in the scene, actively engaged in the mise-en-scène that forms his poetry. In writing the poems, the roles of spectator and actor merge as he remembers his performance and writes down his version of events. This allows Sassoon to take an omniscient vantage point: his role of acting the soldier and then reflecting on his soldierly duties, which both transpire as performance. The notion of actor and spectator add further weight to the notion of the dichotomy within Sassoon.

The notions of spectator and actor can be conceptualised as follows: the super-ego is posited as the spectator judging the actor, who is the ideal ego, to see if the performance measures up to the super-ego’s expectations – a process which is essentially the dynamic mediated through the ego. The ego works dynamically with

the super-ego and its identities; it is a mediator which ‘owes service to three masters and is consequently menaced by three dangers: from the external world, from the libido of the id, and from the severity of the super-ego’ (Freud, 1923, p. 56). Loosely translated, for Sassoon this equates to: the id, the site of instinct, (un)pleasure and gratification of desires, the super-ego in correlation with the ego-ideal of Sassoon’s inherited models of masculinity, which is compounded with the hypermasculine soldier of the war. In this interplay, the ego, acting as the reality principle, acts as a mediator between the two. The ego may also change through identification with others where we see similarities with ourselves and ‘undergo radical changes because of it, becoming the intersubjective residue of an intersubjective relationship’ (Laplanche, 1973, p. 136).

Speculatively, the war would have had some impact regarding changes to the ideal ego and the ego within Sassoon’s behaviour. After all, Sassoon had left behind a middle-class civilian life of socialising with gentlemen and was now faced with a mixture of classes and, not least, the hypermasculine arena of war. It is on this premise that I suggest that Sassoon’s dual role of actor and spectator constitutes the intersubjective relationship that his poetry depicts. The role of actor and spectator inevitably incurs a double bind of consciousness. This leads to the suggestion that there was a splitting of the ego for Sassoon, whereby two conflicting notions were simultaneously held.

Freud suggested that in war, a split of the ego occurs into the war ego alongside the peace ego, positing this as a possible cause of war trauma. He also noted that in war neuroses, there is no explicit link between neuroses and sexual instinct yet but comments on ‘[...] the relations which undoubtedly exist between fright, anxiety and narcissistic libido’ (Ferenczi et al., 1921, p.210). Freud, in the same text, further adds

that it is repression that underpins all traumas, be it sexual or external. In the peace ego and war ego, Freud explicitly suggests a spilt ego with the new formation of the parasitic double. I suggest that the split for Sassoon, presented through actor and spectator, occurred partly due to the pressure to perform an idealised hetero-hypermasculinity in the war, which he attempted to perform but simultaneously also resisted; by way of defence of this contradiction, the ego was split.

Freud in a later text (1938) suggests that the split ego is a defensive process of displacement and repression; he uses castration anxiety as an example. After being admonished for masturbation and the threat of castration, the child recalls the lack of a penis in the female genitals. The child has two choices: renounce the instinctual desire for masturbation or disavow the threat of castration. Freud comments on how this process can lead to fetishism because of conflicting demands between instinct and what is allowed by reality. The child responds to this dichotomy by rejecting reality and refusing prohibition but simultaneously recognises the danger of reality. The child's instinct retains its satisfaction, whilst also allowing for reality to be acknowledged. 'The two contrary reactions to the conflict persist as the centre-point of a splitting of the ego, [the child] creates a substitute for the penis which he missed in females – that is to say a fetish' (Freud, 1938, p. 274-275).

Sassoon's dichotomy of self, his conflicted castration anxiety, prohibited desires, the notion of repression, fetishism, and perspectives of splitting are all evident in his poem 'The Kiss', published between 1915 and 1917.

> 'To these I turn, in these I trust;
> Brother Lead and Sister Steel.
> To his blind power I make appeal;
> I guard her beauty clean from rust.
>
> He spins and burns and loves the air,
> And splits a skull to win my praise;

But up the nobly marching days
She glitters naked, cold and fair.

Sweet Sister grant your soldier this;
That in good fury he may feel
The body where he sets his heel
Quail from your downward darting kiss' (Sassoon, 1961, p. 15).

In 'The Kiss', Sassoon personifies parts of his weapon as siblings: 'Brother Lead and Sister Steel', bullet and gun respectively, and elaborates on the gendering of parts of the guns. Brother Lead is described as active: 'he spins, burns and loves the air'. The conjunction 'but' then introduces the feminine barrel: 'she is static, glittering with beauty, naked and cold and fair'. Sexual, incestuous connotations dominate the second stanza as the brother and sister work together in an orgasmic tryst of penetration, presented as 'splitting the skull'. Inferred in this split is a subliminal reference to a psychical split within himself. The split skull also describes a wound, which suggests cutting, leading to a reading of castration. The gun, being a signifier of violence, is symbolically phallic, and in this reading lends itself to an interpretation of symbolic castration.

The concept of the Freudian split ego is akin to Melanie Klein's ideas regarding splitting, formulated in her ideas on the paranoid-schizoid position (1946). Klein suggested that in childhood there is difficulty integrating the two basic drives of love and hate, and so a separation occurs for the child between good and bad, which become part objects. For example, instead of the whole mother, the child separates her from the breast, which is further split into two-part objects: one that is good and gratifying and satiates the child's hunger need, and one that is bad as the child goes unfed. It is this early phase – the first few months of the child's life – which Klein denotes as the paranoid position. Reconciliation must occur for the child to accept that contradictions can exist in one whole object, which in turn leads to the depressive

position and the notion of guilt. This is due to the child's frustration and their phantasies of matricide where their anger towards the breast was in fact toward the mother. The schizoid position refers to the splitting of good and bad.

A Kleinian perspective of splitting also informs a reading of 'The Kiss'. Sassoon shows the paranoid position of splitting the object, the gun, into male and female, and weapon as a bad object with its connotations of murder and death. Yet the gun is also a good object – a phallic symbol with connotations of pleasure. The splitting is indicative of Sassoon as both soldier and poet, and his difficulty in reconciling his dichotomous self, which leads to the schizoid position if the final line is read literally, with the object as a gun, which infers death through self-sacrifice, and an absolved guilt for his sexual desires. From a Freudian perspective, Sassoon's instinctual, prohibited homosexual desires, find satisfaction in sublimation and displacement. This is seen in the fetishising of the gun, which is transformed into a symbolic phallus. Fetishism, according to Freud, is 'a special form of penis substitute [for] the boy who apprehends his mother's lack of a penis as the representation of his own possible castration' (Freud, 1927, p. 154). Still, Sassoon allows expression of the danger of reality and simultaneous satisfaction of his sexual desires. Both a Freudian and Kleinian interpretation do, however, merge, as Klein suggests that 'the ego is incapable of splitting the object – internal or external – without a corresponding splitting taking place within the ego' (Klein, 1993, p. 6). So, Sassoon's spitting of the gun into good and bad objects only arises due to the initial splitting of his ego.

The split ego is further explained by Laplanche (1973) as:

> 'the coexistence at the heart of the ego of two psychical attitudes towards external reality insofar as this stands in the way of an instinctual demand. The first of these attitudes take reality into consideration, while the second disavows it and replaces it by a product of desire'.

Sassoon's poem is both aware of external reality, with the literal threatening power of the gun, but also disavows it through the transformation of the gun into a symbolic phallus – a product of desire for Sassoon. Laplanche's definition of the split ego aligns with Freud's (1960) view on drama. He states, 'the psychological drama becomes psychopathological when the source of the suffering which we are to share and from which we are to derive pleasure is no longer a conflict between two almost equally conscious motivations, but one between conscious and repressed ones' (Freud and Bunker, 1960, p. 146-147). For Sassoon, the actor performing to the demands of the hypermasculine, heterosexual soldier, in conflict with his ego and his sexual desires, offers a valid reading considering Freud's notions on drama. Sassoon's dichotomy, brought to the forefront through the poet in this poem reflecting and arbitrating on the conflict that resides within him, can be traced to the Oedipus complex, with a particular emphasis on the castration phase.

The simple *mise-en-scène* of Sassoon and his gun belies its innocence, with the poem's erotic title offering an indication of the content of the poem which is permeated with conflicting images of masculine identity, homosexuality and incestuous desires. The poem acts as a site of erotic transference; Sassoon's desires are sublimated through displacement onto objects such as the parts of the gun, which allows for his prohibited fears and conflicted desires around castration to be expressed through the poem. For Sassoon, there is a conflicting wish for and simultaneous defence against castration. As an actor, he is the active agent, yet he moves in the poem to the passive agent, in the third stanza, where he becomes the sister's soldier. Sassoon is now wishing for castration and expresses a desire to be penetrated: 'quail from your downward darting kiss'.

Freud's case study of the Wolf Man (1918) offers illuminating insights on themes stemming from the Oedipus complex and elucidates readings of 'The Kiss' with Sassoon's castration anxieties as well as gender and sexuality. In his case study, Freud identifies a type of pre-Oedipal, narcissistic masculinity underpinned by castration anxiety. Freud's interpretation begins with the patient's nightmare of six or seven white wolves with big tails and his fear of being eaten by them, noting at one point in the dream that others mount a castrated wolf, who then becomes aware of its lack of a tail and its castration (Freud, 1918, p. 29).

> 'It seems, therefore, as though he (the Wolf Man) had identified himself with his castrated mother during the dream and was now fighting against that fact. "If you want to be sexually satisfied by Father", we may perhaps represent him as saying to himself, "you must allow yourself to be castrated like Mother; but I won't have that." In short, a clear protest on the part of his masculinity' (Freud, 1918, p. 49).

The Wolf Man's protest would be later identified as a syndrome, known as 'symbiosis anxiety […] the ubiquitous fear that one's sense of maleness and masculinity are in danger […] succumbing to the pull of merging with the mother' (Stoller, 1975, p. 149). Freud, however, suggested that the dream indicated fear of the father: 'In my patient's case, the wolf was merely a first father surrogate' (Freud, 1918, p. 32). For Freud, a wish to be homosexual, played out in the inverse Oedipus complex, is a wish to be in the place of the mother: 'to be sexually satisfied by him, (the father) […] all this at the price of masculinity' (Freud, 1918, p. 101). This also subtly infers a desire for castration by the Wolf Man.

On a broader level, Freud, along with his patient, establishes the primacy of the penis and implicitly the privileged status of hetero-masculinity. The fear of losing the penis frames it as something that is privileged and desired. Within the paradigm of the penis as important, as Freud argues, he firstly conflates biological sex and gender:

male sex is ‘defined by the appearance of being defined by something (the penis) positive – that which the male has and the female lacks’ (Frosh, 1994, p. 79). Here, Freud’s interpretation is, again, biased towards a heterocentric model, favoured over non-normative sexuality. Sassoon, in ‘The Kiss’, depicts his homosexual desires, albeit subliminally, and depicts a desire for castration, like the castrated wolf. Sassoon, like Freud and the Wolf Man, working within a phallocentric paradigm, indicates that castration precipitates penetration, which results in the sacrifice of masculinity. However, evidenced in Sassoon’s poem, it is an emasculation that is accepted by him through the reconciliation of sexual desire and castration. An alternative reading of Sassoon and ‘The Kiss’ is that of the ego and super-ego. The ego presents as Sassoon, the poet and spectator with homosexual desires, which are prohibited by the actor, that is the soldier, read as the super-ego. Freud comments on the ego in a state of conflict, noting that,

> ‘the hysterical ego fends off a distressing perception with which the criticisms of its super-ego threaten it, in the same way in which it is in the habit of fending off an unendurable object-cathexis – by an act of repression. It is the ego that is responsible for the inferiority’ (Freud, 1923, p. 50).

The reading of ego and super-ego could be tentatively argued based on the grounds of the subliminal displacement, that I suggest, is evident in the poem. This produces some sense of unconscious guilt and/or inferiority in Sassoon. Freud explains in ‘The Ego and the Id’ (1923) that guilt often remains unconscious as its origin can be traced back to the Oedipus complex and incestuous and patricidal desires towards the parents. Guilt is, therefore, an internal process occurring within the ego. There also exists a social element as the ego conflicts with the super-ego, formed from the external environment, due to the role of significant others in its development, as seen in the earlier discussion on identifications.

From an Oedipal perspective, for Sassoon, the objects of his cathexis, or the focus of his desires, are channelled towards other men instead of the parent, yet are still prohibited by the super-ego. The ego fails to repress Sassoon's desires, which for him leads to an implicit sense of emasculation and castration. The fear of castration leads to a cyclical pattern of trauma stemming from the unconscious guilt of Oedipal desires, re-triggered for Sassoon in war and compounded by the conscious guilt of his failure to successfully perform hetero-masculinity. In Sassoon's writing, his prohibited desires of homosexuality are subliminally released.

At the end of the Wolf Man case study, Freud concludes that for his patient, 'the world was hidden from him by a veil' (Freud, 1918, p. 99). Freud interprets the veil as a return to the womb, suggesting notions from Otto Rank's theory of the desire to be back in a blissful state (Rank, 1993) or indicating a desire for closeness to the father (Blos, 1985). Freud instead posits: 'he wished he could be back in the womb, not simply in order that he might then be re-born, but in order that he might be copulated there by his father, might obtain sexual satisfaction from him, and might bear him a child' (Freud, 1918, p. 103). All three readings are relevant to Sassoon. First, the return to the womb is reflected in the desire to escape the war, to retreat to safety, producing guilt due to his failed masculinity. In another poem, titled in reference to the day of the crucifixion of Jesus according to the Judeo-Christian calendar, 'Stand-to: Good Friday Morning', Sassoon directly expresses his desire to escape, with further castration desires, and connotations of guilt: 'O Jesus, send me a wound to-day, / And I'll believe in Your bread and wine,/ and get my bloody old sins washed white!' (Sassoon, 1961, p. 24). In a diary entry, Sassoon further expresses his desire to escape the war in a style that expresses his desire to perform to the ideal of the hypermasculine soldier:

> ‘I am bound to get it in the neck sometime, so why not make a credible show, and let people see that poets can fight as well as anybody else? And death is the best adventure of all!’ (Hart- Davis, 1981, p. 53).

In this case, for Sassoon, the closeness to the father could represent his Oedipal sexual desires for the father, or alternatively it could be an expression of a desire to be loved by the father, as Peter Blos notes in the role of the father in the complex (1985). Sassoon’s desires, whether sexual or affectionate, are sublimated through his desires for other men. In his diary, Sassoon reflects on his troop of soldiers paternally while recovering from a head wound: ‘I am amputated from the Battalion. When I was hit it seemed an unspeakable thing to leave my men in the lurch’ (Hart-Davis, 1981 p. 273). Sassoon goes on to express his guilt over leaving his men, as well as an indication of how he believed they perceived him.

> ‘I hear them saying “When’s the Captain coming back? Oh, he’s a proper lad, he is” […] And somehow the idea of death had beckoned to me. […] In my heart it is the only way I can keep my soul clean and vindicate my pride in the men who love and trust me’ (Hart-Davis, 1981, p. 275).

In the quotation above, Sassoon reflects upon his own desire for death, again with hints of guilt over failing his troop, and implicitly of failing himself, valued only in relation to his support for his men. At other times, Sassoon’s parental attitude shifts to a writing style that has voyeuristic and homoerotic overtones in the description of his comrades. This can be seen, for example in the poem ‘In Barracks’.

> ‘Young Fusiliers, strong-legged and bold,
> March and wheel and march again.
> […]
> To watch the soldiers of the Line
> That life has hired to fight with fate.
> […]
> Up comes the dark; down goes the sun.
> The square is walled with windowed light.

Sleep well, you lusty Fusiliers;
Shut your brave eyes on sense and sight' (Sassoon, 1961, p. 95).

The parental desire reading links back to Freud and the Wolf Man, with the fear of the feminine, expressed in Sassoon's focalisation, of how he imagines the men perceive him, along with his desire for masculine identity, with the line, 'proper lad'. The sexual desire reading leads back to Freud's perspective of the Oedipal desire of being copulated by the father, which is framed in Sassoon's projected, subliminal, and homoerotic framing of the soldiers. Both readings present, in the phallocentric context of war, a fear of failure in performing hetero-masculinity.

Throughout the text of the Wolf Man, Freud links homosexuality, passivity, and femininity together, and by deduction, the heterosexual masculine is presented as active and privileged. The conflation of homosexuality, passivity and femininity is further evident in Freud's case studies of Da Vinci (1910) and also Judge Schreber (1911). In the case of Schreber, Freud discusses the memoir of Judge Schreber through the framework of psychosis, with a key theme being paranoia. However, there are several other subtler themes that emerge in the case study that are relevant to this study: the father complex, incest, and the castration complex. In the Da Vinci case study, the role of sublimation, a fixation on one's mother, and the father's absence, are discussed, and in both the da Vinci and Schreber cases, homosexuality is discussed. These themes would transpire as concepts in the complete Oedipal complex. The case studies offer further insight into the phallocentric thinking of Freud which, I suggest, was indicative of the cultural period.

Freud suggested that Da Vinci sublimated 'the unhappiness of his erotic life and has triumphed over it in his art by representing the wishes of the boy, infatuated by his mother, as fulfilled in this blissful union of the male and female natures' (1910,

p. 117). Freud reveals his heteronormative perspective in the suggestion that Da Vinci never had homosexual sex, writing that ‘a high degree of sexual activity is not to be attributed to him’ (1910, p. 72). Freud again deters from any inference of sexual activity from Da Vinci when he describes Da Vinci’s relationship with his entourage of beautiful boys as maternal. ‘He treated them with kindness and consideration, looked after them, and when they were ill, nursed them himself, just as a mother nurses her children and just as his own mother might have tended him’ (Freud, 1910, p. 101). Freud noted that once Leonardo had finished a painting, he ceased to care about it. This was seen as a repetition of his father’s absences – a foreshadowing of the role of the father to be developed in the Oedipus complex. Castration features were bound up with masculinity. Freud further expands upon this: ‘Under the influence of this threat of castration, he now sees the notion he has gained of the female genitals in a new light; henceforth he will tremble for his masculinity’ (1910, p. 94).

In Freud’s reading of Schreber’s memoirs, he concluded that Schreber had emasculation fantasies, described by Freud as homosexuality, with projection as the defence mechanism. There is, in both case studies, implicit in the Da Vinci case study and explicit in the Schreber case study, an equating of femininity and homosexuality. Masculinity is set up in both case studies as a primary and preferred gender identity in patriarchal society.

Sassoon’s conflicts around sexuality are brought to consciousness via the working through of the issues in his poetry in the hypermasculine arena of war and the privileging of hetero-masculinity. Sassoon reflects on his state of mind during the war in his diary of 1916, where he alludes to his psychical conflict, breaking into his consciousness, with desires of catharsis as well as hints of un-relinquished, prohibited sexual desires and subliminal guilt.

> ‘In my heart there’s a cruel war that must be waged
> In darkness vile with moans and bleeding bodies maimed;
> A gnawing hunger drives me, wild to be assuaged,
> And bitter lust chuckles within me unashamed’
> (Sassoon’s diary entry, in Hart-Davis, 1983, p. 52).

Sassoon declared his homosexuality in 1911, in a letter to his friend, Edward Carpenter, after reading Carpenter’s revolutionary book on homosexuality, *The Intermediate Sex.* Carpenter wrote about and defended male homosexual lives in a culture where homosexual activity was still illegal and provoked moral outrage, as seen from the Oscar Wilde trial for gross indecency in England in 1895. This followed Wilde’s affair with a British aristocrat, which was made public. Although much earlier than the time of Sassoon’s poetry, this conservative climate still prevailed in English culture. Carpenter attempted to educate the public by challenging the heteronormative attitudes of the period with his book. The following is an example of one of Carpenter’s entries,

> ‘He loves, defies his male beloved one, exactly as the woman-wooing man does *his* beloved. For him, he is capable of the greatest sacrifice, experiences the torments of unhappy, often unrequited, love, of faithlessness on his beloved’s part, of jealousy, and so forth’ (1908, p. 59).

Freud’s thinking on homosexuality was diverse and contradictory. In early texts, he refers to homosexuality as an inversion of the Oedipus complex (1905). In the same text, he notes that ‘their compulsive longing for men has turned out to be determined by their ceaseless flight from women’ (Freud, 1905, p. 143). Freud would go on to say that:

> ‘in all our male homosexual cases, the subjects had had a very intense erotic attachment to a female person, as a rule, their mother […] reinforced by the small part played by the father during their childhood. Indeed, it almost seems as though the presence of a strong father would ensure that the son made the correct decision in his

> choice of object, namely someone of the opposite sex.' (Freud, 1910, p. 99).

However, a footnote was added in 1915 to Freud's text of 1905:

> 'all humans are capable of making a homosexual object-choice and have in fact made one in their unconscious […] Indeed, libidinal attachments to persons of the same-sex play no less a part of factors in normal mental life than do similar attachments to the opposite sex' (Freud, 1915, p. 11).

Later Freud would note that homosexuality was a developmental mid-point between immature narcissism and mature heterosexuality (Freud, 1911). Freud also conflates biological and social arguments with a heterocentric biological perspective based on reproduction: 'We term sexual activity perverse when it has renounced the aim of reproduction and follows the pursuit of pleasure as an independent goal' (Freud, 1920, p. 273). Freud also suggests a reparative approach to homosexuality as a defence against anxiety and fear of women. Freud would then contradict his ideas of homosexual men's 'flight from women' and suggest it as an identification with women in the form of the mother that constitutes homosexuality. Freud also suggested that upon discovering that the mother is 'castrated', the boy is plagued with intense castration anxiety, which causes him to seek a 'woman with a penis' (Freud, 1920; 1922). Freud also took a familial interpretation of homosexuality and suggested that in a family of male siblings, there is sadistic jealousy, which results in the love of the father being converted into the love of other men. This is interesting considering that Sassoon did have an older brother, who was also homosexual. Despite Freud's contradictions, the following quote makes his position clear. He writes, 'I am of the firm conviction that homosexuals must not be treated as sick people' (Bem, 1993, p. 90).

Freud offers a social perspective on homosexuality in describing the evolutionary basis of sexuality. In 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality' (1905), Freud suggests taking a social perspective.

> 'Psychoanalysis considers that a choice of an object independently of its sex – freedom to range equally over male and female objects – as it is found in childhood, in primitive states of society and early periods of history, is the original basis from which, as a result of restriction in one direction or the other, both the normal and the inverted types develop' (1905, p. 143).

Freud outlined the separation of sexual behaviour from gender – a radical insight which allowed for diverse perspectives on sexuality:

> 'It is one of the obvious social injustices that the standard of civilization should demand from everyone the same sexual life-conduct […] which imposes the heaviest psychical sacrifices on others' (referring to homosexuals) (Freud, 1908, p. 192).

Freud implies that in a heteronormative society, even more so in the period of his writing, being homosexual would have carried enormous stress and pressure to conform to expected social norms. He further expresses the pressures in the social environment, suggesting that most homosexuals entered analysis for 'external motives, such as social disadvantages and danger attaching to his choice of object' (Freud, 1920, p. 151). Freud notes that it was not a 'cure' that was sought but an assurance that the man had tried to change, that is, fit in with heterocentric normativity, and that he could 'now resign himself with an easy conscience' to his sexual pleasure (Freud, 1920, p. 150). Freud's statement offers an implicit acknowledgement of Adler's notion of masculine protest – a concept based on the assumptions of the social and sexual inferiority of women in a culture that equates power with men, indicative of a heterocentric patriarchal society.

Despite the prohibition and social stigma associated with homosexuality, in 1915 Sassoon met and fell in love with David Thomas, whom he affectionately nicknamed Tommy. Sassoon recalls in his diary the same year news of Tommy's death, shrouded in ironic religious imagery. 'Now he comes back to me in memories like an angel […] we had lived together four weeks […] in rooms where the previous occupant's name, Paradise, was written above the door' (Hart-Davis, 1983, p. 45). An indication of pleasure but also imbued with religious connotations and, implicitly, guilt. Sassoon goes on to reminisce about Tommy in verse: 'For you were glad, and kind and brave: with hands that clasped me young and warm' (Hart-Davis, 1983, p. 45). Sassoon's homoerotic fixation on younger and often heterosexual men would continue throughout the war.

Masculinity, homosexuality, and guilt merge for Sassoon together with notions of the father, which has both Oedipal and religious connotations. Sassoon's poems often symbolically use religious iconography alluding to the sacrificial death of the Judeo-Christian Father. For example, Sassoon's unpublished poems, 'Via Crucis' (Sassoon, 2018a) and 'The Stunt' (Sassoon, 2018b) both equate the suffering of the soldier to the figure of Christ. Another poem, 'Golgotha' (Sassoon, 1961, p. 14) describes the war zone Sassoon fought in, with its title a reference to the place of Christ's crucifixion. Adrien Caesar (1993) claims that the iconic Judeo-Christian symbol of crucifixion, which signifies love but is also imbued with misery and pain for the sake of satisfaction through sacrifice, alludes to a relationship between sadomasochism and religion. Caesar goes on to suggest that 'selfless sacrifice, coupled with the governance of manhood in the war [presents] the image of stoicism and aggression, as manly qualities contributed necessary to the salvation of the Empire' (Caesar, 1993, p. 5). Sassoon's 'Redeemer' (1915-17) captures the sense of

sacrifice with one of his comrades framed dramatically in the portrayal of a crucifixion. The soldier is posed as if in a staged tableau, witnessed by Sassoon as a spectator in the dramatic scene; Sassoon sees no hero but a resigned figure of torture and pain.

> ‘Floundering in mirk. He stood before me there;
> I say that He was Christ; stiff in the glare,
> And leaning forward from His burdening task,
> Both arms supporting it; His eyes on mine
> Stared from the woeful head that seemed a mask
> Of mortal pain in Hell’s unholy shine.
> No thorny crown, only a woollen cap
> He wore – an English soldier, white and strong
> […]
> I say that he was Christ, who wrought to bless
> All groping things with freedom bright as air
> And with His mercy washed and made them fair’ (Sassoon, 1961, p. 16).

Freud links Christianity and sacrifice with the Oedipus complex and suggests that crucifixion presents a symbolic manifestation of the return of the repressed, allowing the subject to work through, by repetition, past traumatic events, in order to master the Oedipus complex. Freud argues that the sacrifice of Christ posits a collective cultural substitution whereby the Christian father replaces the biological father. In Freud’s explanation, he uses the example of the totem father, where the sons murder their father, whose existence prevented them access to women, in the ritual slaying of the father explained in *Totem and Taboo:*

> ‘He (the son) himself became God, besides, or, more correctly, in place of, the father. A son-religion displaced the father-religion […] the ancient totem meal was revived in the form of communion, in which the company of brothers consumed the flesh […] Thus we can trace through the ages the identity of the totem meal with animal sacrifice […] The Christian communion, however, is essentially a fresh elimination of the father, a repetition of the guilty deed’ (Freud, 1913, p. 153-154).

Elimination of the father still ensures that the premise of masculinity remains paramount through the success of the modelling of the father, and further relegates

femininity, depicted by the fact that women are merely passive pawns of male desire in Freud's totem origin. Freud goes on to add that the sacrifice (of the father) and subsequent 'atonement with the father was all the more complete since the sacrifice was accompanied by a total renunciation of the women on whose account the rebellion against the father was started' (Freud, 1913, p. 153). It is the renunciation of women that leads to a queer analysis of Sassoon's 'Redeemer' by Moorcroft-Wilson (2013, p. 268) stating that 'he could only like men, women were antipathetic to him'. The relegation, or repression, of the feminine is also evident in the fact that, with the exception of the poem written to his mother, the rare instances of female characters in Sassoon's poetry are portrayed negatively, such as in 'The Glory Of Women' and 'Their Frailty' (both published in *Counter-attack and Other Poems,* 1918), as 'women here are portrayed as wide-eyed, coy, sadistic and empty-headed' (Moorcroft-Wilson, 2013, p. 258).

Sassoon's character in 'Redeemer', depicted as a soldier, symbolises the death and sacrifice of another soldier, or, with Freud's implicit reasoning, a sacrificial murder of the father – one that Sassoon would agree with considering the lamenting tone of the poem. Sassoon also situates the dying soldier through an Oedipal paradigm, as I go on to illustrate. In 'The Redeemer', from Freud's perspective of the murder of the father and my interpretation of the relegation of the feminine, Sassoon substitutes his father with his comrade in the poem. Through substitution and consequent elimination of the feminine, Sassoon subliminally restores the premise of his masculinity, diffusing any sense of masculine inadequacy he may have felt, as previously discussed, in a way not dissimilar to Freud's 'Wolf Man'. Sassoon mourns not only his comrade but his father too, as the crucifixion scene repeats the death of his father as a way to manage past trauma. The poem and its undercurrent of Sassoon being the helpless

spectator situate Sassoon as a powerless child witnessing his father's death. Also, the dying comrade or substitute father further releases Oedipal guilt from Sassoon's aggressive wishes toward his father as the rival, as occurs in the positive Oedipus complex. Residual guilt from the complex becomes absolved through the crucifixion scene, and Sassoon can both grieve and abreact his guilt. There is a sense of reparation for Sassoon – 'a relief of guilt or anxiety for having had aggressive wishes toward a loved and needed object' (Auchincloss, 2012, p. 264).

Sassoon presents the figure of the redeemer as atonement for feelings of guilt concerning his sexual desires. The act of reparation by Sassoon in the poem leads to another reading, which also indicates that Sassoon is projecting his super-ego, fending off guilt and directing guilt into the image of a sacrificial figure – the comrade who stands in as the Judeo-Christian figure of sacrifice, Christ. Here, Sassoon, situated as the aggressor, projects his guilt onto others.

Freud's Wolf Man further highlights the theme of sexuality in a reading of 'The Redeemer'. On the Wolf Man's delusion that he was Christ, Freud adds that

> 'the chief motive forces the influence had on him was his identification with the figure of Christ […]. Along this path his extravagant love of his father, which had made the repression (of homosexual feelings) necessary, found its way at length to an ideal sublimation' (Freud, 1918, p. 115).

Sassoon in the 'Redeemer' further identifies with his comrade, and thus with Christ, as a fellow soldier of sacrifice, through focalising and projecting his thoughts onto his comrade.

> 'Who loved his time like any simple chap,
> Good days of work and sport and homely song;
> Now he has learned that nights are very long,
> And dawn a watching of the windowed sky.
> But to the end, unjudging, he'll endure

Horror and pain, not uncontent to die'
(Sassoon, 1961, p. 16).

Freud goes on to distinguish between repression and sublimation. Repression is an unconscious force preventing painful or unwanted thoughts from entering consciousness whilst sublimation is a conscious redirection of energies away from unacceptable impulses and towards more acceptable pursuits.

Freud gives three further reasons to explain why the Wolf Man did not use sublimation. Firstly, this was due to psychical inertia where sublimation would have struggled – a concept arguably reflected in Sassoon's resistance to the prohibition of his sexuality. Secondly, according to Freud, the crucifixion story holds ambivalent feelings about the Father; this, being a fundamental element of the Oedipus complex, would have implicitly occurred for Sassoon. Thirdly, Freud notes that the presence of earlier repressed homosexual and aggressive feelings prevented further sublimation. Sassoon undoubtedly would have had to repress his homosexuality up until and during the war not only because it was illegal but also to sustain his performance of the heteronormative soldier. As a consequence of the repression of his homosexuality, Sassoon sublimates his same-sex desire through his poetry, much like Leonardo Da Vinci, discussed earlier, who sublimated his own desires into art. In effect, Sassoon was caught up in a drama of his own making, acting out the role of a heterosexual solider whilst still allowing his prohibited desires to be expressed, sublimated, through his poems

Freud (1960) suggests that there are three classifications of drama that can combine in any variety: the social, the character, and the psychological. Sassoon's 'Redeemer' illustrates all three. In the social classification of drama, the 'struggle of the hero against the social community' is clear in the community of soldiers in the

context of war. The character drama is evident in that there is a ‘struggle between men themselves’ (Freud and Bunker, 1960, p. 145). Finally, the psychological drama is also portrayed:

> ‘For it is within the soul of the hero himself that there takes place an anguished struggle between various impulses: a struggle which must end, not with the downfall of the hero, but with that of one of the contending impulses, in other words, with a renunciation’ (Freud and Bunker, 1960, p. 146).

Sassoon, faced with suffering, rejects the father, religion, war, and the image of the warrior soldier. Sassoon’s poem through reparation absolves him of Oedipal conflict and guilt. However, it is difficult to ignore that there is an element of sadistic pleasure in the poem with Sassoon absolving himself of guilt through the figure of another’s pain.

In Freud’s later text, *Civilisation and its Discontents* (1930), he takes a social perspective, where he notes the idea of a ‘cultural super-ego' at work, a kind of moral conscience that is governed by societal norms. Freud notes how societies function civilly only as a result of implemented laws that prohibit certain behaviours such as incest, rape, aggression and homosexuality. Taboos are established related to such behaviours with punishments exacted if the rules are broken. The ironic quality of civilisation is that some laws may foster suppression and thus result in discontentment; a case in point would be Sassoon and homosexuality.

In *Civilisation and its Discontents* (1930), Freud further develops his theory of instinct from the pleasure principle (1920), which suggests that his concept of libido must now be separated into two distinct instincts: the object-instinct of eros, a life drive and the ego-instinct of thanatos, a death drive. Freud suggested that the life instincts were opposed by the death instincts, as opposed to earlier theories where he stated that the life instinct was opposed by the ego in mediating desires. According to Freud,

‘men are not gentle creatures […] but are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness’ (Freud, 1930, p. 111). Freud offers three options to control aggression. They include repression (the unconscious avoidance of thoughts), suppression (the conscious avoidance of thoughts and sublimation) and the redirection of energy towards a more socially acceptable actions or behaviours. A consequence of the repressed aggression, however, is that the super-ego redirects aggression back upon the subject and self-punishment ensues, derived from guilt, which Freud terms ‘moral masochism’ (Freud, 1924). Freud writes, ‘in most other (as opposed to obsessional neurosis) cases and forms of neurosis it [the sense of guilt] remains completely unconscious’ (1930, p. 135).

For Sassoon, there is an unconscious desire for punishment, which could be due to his conflicted gender and sexual identity and failings of hetero-hypermasculinity in the war. Guilt, punishment, gender and sexuality all come together, fused with past Oedipal desires in Sassoon’s ‘Conscripts’ (1915-17).

> ‘Fall in, that awkward squad, and strike no more
> Attractive attitudes! Dress by the right!
> […]
> They gasped and sweated, marching up and down.
> I drilled them till they cursed my raucous shout.
> Love chucked his lute away and dropped his crown.
> Rhyme got sore heels and wanted to fall out.
> “Left, right! Press on your butts!” They looked at me
> Reproachful; how I longed to set them free!
>
> I gave them lectures on Defence, Attack;
> They fidgeted and shuffled, yawned and sighed,
> And boggled at my questions. Joy was slack,
> And Wisdom gnawed his fingers, gloomy-eyed.
> Young Fancy – how I loved him all the while –
> Stared at his note-book with a rueful smile’
> (Sassoon, 1961, p. 30).

Sassoon leads a group of soldiers in training, in the position of an actor, where he sublimates his homosexual desire; alternatively, as a spectator, Sassoon identifies with the Oedipal aggressor through reaction formation, diffusing the threat of castration from the father by becoming the potential castrator himself. The poem smacks of dramatic stage direction with flat characters of simple traits – pawns for Sassoon's psychic Oedipal drama to be re-enacted, where he is situated centre-stage. The following verbs – 'fidgets, shuffled, gasped, sweated' – add to the erotic transference of Sassoon's desires, peppered with dialogue to complete the scene. The conscript scene conveys an image of a sadist with violently loaded words of defence and attack alluding to sadomasochism contained in the poem, continued further in the poem with the sexual objectification of men. The innuendo of the 'press' of 'butts' and the personification of Rhyme, Joy, Wisdom, and Fancy combine to depict subjects that a paternal Sassoon effectively abuses in a metaphorical beating fantasy.

Sassoon, in the final line of verse one, indicates feelings of reparation, as he shifts from the actor in the drama to the spectator, recalling the event, depicted as a homoerotic tableau of men, which allows for the release of his prohibited sexual desires. Freud comments on the spectator, who:

> 'wants to feel, to act, to mold the world in the light of his desire – in short, to be a hero [and] give way unashamedly to suppressed impulses such as the need for freedom in religious, political, social, or sexual respects' (Freud and Bunker, 1960, p. 145).

'Conscripts' also presents a parody of the masculine warrior soldier with the violent authority of his actions to the soldiers, who are in turn passive objects. Freud denotes sadism as active and masculine, and masochism as feminine and passive (Freud, 1905). Thus the soldiers are feminised while Sassoon as the sadist retains his

masculinity. Interpreting Sassoon's poem through a reaction-formation reading, it is Sassoon who wishes to be feminine and situated as the subject of suffering.

Sadomasochism and Oedipal origins are expressed in 'A Child is Being Beaten' (Freud, 1919). Freud suggests that there are three phases in beating phantasies; each scenario 'shows us the child involved in the agitations of its parental complex' (Freud, 1919, p. 185). First, there is the conscious idea or actual act of the father beating a younger child, which stems from jealousy and rivalry from the subject, and allows the belief that they, alone, are loved by the father, as the beating 'signifies a deprivation of love and a humiliation' (Freud, 1919, p. 185). The second phase, an unconscious construction, is a desire to be beaten by the father, the origins of which are Oedipal guilt. According to Freud, this marks the origin of masochism. The third phase is conscious and sexually stimulating where there is a phantasy of being beaten by someone in a position of authority where the subject is the spectator of the phantasy, usually, according to Freud, with more than one child present.

Freud suggests a gender difference in beating phantasies. The boy's beating phantasies are 'passive from the very beginning and derived from a feminine attitude towards his father […] which the father is taken as the object of love' (Freud, 1919, p. 198), as in the inverted Oedipal complex. Freud goes on to say that in the third spectatorial phase of beating phantasies – that is the female's phantasy – the person(s) being beaten by the father are male. He adds that by doing this, she 'escapes from the demands of the erotic side of her life altogether' (Freud, 1919, p. 198). However, for the boy, Freud puts the 'mother in the place of his father; but he retains his own figure, with the result that the person beating, and the person being beaten are of opposite sex' (Freud, 1919, p. 198). Freud adds that by this substitution of gender, the male

> ‘evades his homosexuality by repressing and remodelling his unconscious phantasy […] his later conscious phantasy is that it has for its content a feminine attitude without a homosexual object-choice. […] The boy, nevertheless feels like a woman in his conscious phantasies and endows the women who are beating him with masculine attributes and characteristics’ (Freud, 19191, p. 198-199).

Freud gives an account for the different phantasies between the sexes in the argument that it is because of bisexual constitution: ‘with men, what is unconscious and repressed can be brought down to feminine instinctual impulses; and conversely with women’ (Freud, 1919, p. 200). In other words, there is a repression of the opposite sex within each person. There is a clear indication of Adler’s masculine protest in the beating phantasies, which Freud refutes, noting that while it may appear true for the female, it fails for the male in that he puts himself in the feminine position. For Freud, this is a passive position. If the repression of the opposite sex in each gender includes a material perspective, this sheds a new light on Freud’s interpretations.

I suggest that for the girl, the third phase of her phantasy could be that she acknowledges the symbolic privilege of men and appropriates this in her fantasy, which then turns into a beating of a patriarchal figure, which leads to a symbolic protest against patriarchal inequality between the sexes. What is stimulating, moreover, is the power that the girl has appropriated from men in her phantasy. If this potential exists for the girl, and considering that the (homosexual) boy in turn has taken on a passive position, likened to the feminine, the same argument would logically follow with him beating a heterocentric symbol of patriarchy due to the fact that the repression of Oedipal guilt for the father is transformed into a heteronormative phantasy.

Sassoon’s ‘Conscripts’ reflects various interpretations of the beating phantasy. Firstly, the beating is to ward off jealous competitiveness for the parent’s affection, punishing the rival, which, according to Freud, leads to guilt; this is a relevant reading

for Sassoon's poem because Sassoon had two brothers. Secondly, the reading of guilt could also suggest that the phantasy of being beaten by the father was a form of punishment for prohibited sexual desires – all played out by Sassoon in his phantasy. Finally, if the phantasy, as I suggest, reflects an unconscious protest against patriarchy, then Sassoon is also casting a critique against the society that has forced him to suppress his homosexual desires, and furthermore has driven him to perform a hetero-hypermasculinity in the war, as the soldier, which, as has already been noted, is in conflict with the poet.

In conclusion, Sassoon being situated as a spectator in the analysis of the poems given presents not only a theatre of abreaction of Oedipal conflicts; rather, Sassoon's position is complicated by the fact that he too performs, which transforms Sassoon in an act of transivitism: 'It is in an identification with the other that he lives out the whole gamut of reactions of posturing and display […] the actor with spectator, the seduced with the seducer' (Cixous and Clement, 2001, p. 19). There is an apparent dichotomy of the actor versus spectator and subject versus object, which conflate in transivitism, whereby the confusion of the ego between the self and other dissolves (Evans, 1996, p. 216). This which reflects Sassoon's own ego-splitting. Sassoon's poetry reflects an intersubjective reconsideration of masculinity, which not only allows abreaction of Oedipal conflicts but presents an additional conflict and an exploration of masculine heteronormativity. This is illustrated through projection, sublimation, and phantasy, which involved Sassoon in a self-conscious and retrospective reflection on masculinity. This will be explored further in Chapter Three from a social perspective, conceptualised through the work of Lacan and Kristeva.

Chapter Three: Sassoon's Social War

Desiring and Failing Masculinity

Lacan's reworking of the Oedipus complex illuminates the conflicts expressed in Sassoon's poetry, analysed from a social perspective. In this chapter, I suggest that Sassoon's poetry serves as a polemic against the hypermasculinity that the war demanded, which I conceptualise primarily through the notion of desire. This chapter begins by outlining the Lacanian perspective on the Oedipus complex where the notions of lack, desire, *jouissance*, *'object petit a',* and the other are explained. This leads to an analysis of the registers of the Real, Imaginary and Symbolic. I go on to apply readings of the Lacanian concepts in my analysis of Sassoon's poetry. I suggest that hypermasculinity was an ideal strived for and desired by Sassoon, which he attempted to perform but failed. It is from here that I suggest that Sassoon's poetry constitutes a critical response to the pressure of performing the hypermasculine construct, which results in a critique of society and potentially a contributing factor to shell shock. The Lacanian perspective taken is complemented by Julia Kristeva's work on the notion of the other and the abject to add further weight to the argument presented in this chapter.

Lacan reformulated Freud's Oedipus complex as a symbolic structure, conceptualising it through his Paternal Metaphor Seminar (Lacan, 1998). In Lacan's structure of the Oedipus complex, there are three distinct logical (as opposed to chronological) moments when the child passes through the complex. In the first moment, the child comes to recognise that they are not the sole objective of their mother's desire; they begin to realise that she is not always there for them and therefore must have desires elsewhere. This is what Lacan terms to be the 'imaginary

phallus', conceptualised through desire. The imaginary phallus becomes a constant feature in the subject's life, identifying what it is that the other desires, which leads to Lacan's maxim that 'desire is the desire of the other' (Lacan, 1977, p. 235). The child, because of the mother's absences, feels a sense of lack – that they are not enough to satisfy her desires. Simultaneously, they also believe that the mother experiences lack too as she searches for her desires elsewhere to satisfy her sense of lack. In the second instance, the presence of the father is felt, and the prohibition of the incest taboo is established through The-law-of-the-Father. The third moment links to the dissolution of the Oedipus complex: the child has given up on the imaginary phallus through the intervention of the father. The 'way out of the Oedipus complex […] the identification with the father happens at this third moment […] means that he has in his pocket all the title-deeds for him to make use of in the future' (Lacan, 1998, p. 139). Lacan situates the dissolution of the complex in clear reference to a phallocentric society at this point. Lacan concurs with Freud: that at this final moment in the Oedipal stages, the super-ego is formed from the Oedipal identification with the father. The father is identified as 'the one who, for his part, has it [the phallus, the law] […] is interiorized as ego-ideal in the subject and at that very moment the Oedipus complex dissolves' (Lacan, 1998, p. 139).

To summarise, in Lacan's Oedipal paradigm, castration formulates as substitution and encompasses, similar to Freud's ideas on the complex, 'repression and sublimation of desire for the mother, the prohibition of incest and instigation of symbolic law' (Homer, 2005, p. 57). The child, in its wish to return to the union they once had in the Imaginary register, aims to become the imaginary phallus for the mother – the object of her desire. As the mother's desire is usually towards the father, the child believes that he must have the imaginary phallus and so begins identification

with the father. Acceptance of the ‘Name-of-the-Father’ substitutes the desire of the mother, which Lacan terms the ‘paternal metaphor’.

The term, ‘Name-of-the-Father’, Lacan notes, is that which ‘we must recognise the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of the law’ (Lacan, 1977, p. 67). Lacan here points towards the idea of a historically prescribed phallocentric society in a nod to Freud’s totem myth as opposed to offering a phallocentric perspective. The ‘Name-of-the-Father’ has various functions; it sets the taboo on incest and acts as a regulator of desire in that it prescribes what is and what is not socially acceptable. The term also serves a cultural act as ‘a symbolic function to which all group members ... are subjected […]. It provides human beings with an internalized compass of culturally and socially viable principles’ (Vanheule, 2011, p. 61). Benvenuto and Kennedy (1986) offer a further example of the prohibitive function of the function: ‘No, you won’t sleep with your mother’, (and to the mother) ‘No, the child is not your phallus. I have it’ (p. 134). The law imposed by the father is aimed at the child and the mother here – specifically her desire to be the imaginary phallus for the child. A fundamental difference between Freud and Lacan is that the father does not have to be the real father; it could be any substitute, including the mother’s discourse, referring to some figure of authority. Rose explains that ‘We know today that an Oedipus complex can be constituted perfectly well today even if the father is not there, while originally it was the excessive presence of the father which was held responsible for all dramas’ (Rose, 1982, p. 39). In abandoning desire for the mother, the child also gives up the idea of full pleasure, and there is then a double metaphorical castration dependent upon entry to the Symbolic register. Furthermore, the Name-of-the-Father also acts as a signifier that is embedded in the Symbolic

register, that is, in culture or society. The Name-of-the-Father then becomes a signifier of absence and repression, which signifies a feeling of lack experienced by the child.

Lacan distinguished between three kinds of lack in relation to objects, the first being Symbolic Castration and the relinquishing of the Imaginary Phallus. The second type is Imaginary Frustration related to the breast of the mother, akin to Klein's splitting of the object good and bad, as discussed in chapter one. The third kind of lack is Privation – or female castration – and its object is the Symbolic Phallus (Evans, 1998, p. 98). Clearly, in the child's development, there is a catalogue of trauma: from the child being separated from the mother, through the Name-of-the-Father and the relinquishing of the imaginary phallus to the father, along with the accompanying sense of lack and alienation which is invoked from entry into the Symbolic register. It is through entry into the Symbolic register that Lacan suggests a child loses *jouissance*.

Lacan offers three different explanations of *jouissance*. In Seminar VII, he describes it as 'a superabundant vitality that goes beyond pleasure', later adding in Seminar XV11 that '*jouissance* overruns it [the pleasure principle]' (Hewitson, 2015). All Lacan's attempts at describing it seem to fail. Nevertheless, many critics seem to agree that a rough translation of *jouissance* is 'enjoyment'. However, although '*jouissance* seeks satisfaction, in the process it can become suffering and pain' (Moncayo, 2016, p. 50). Lacan acknowledges that *jouissance* can have a malevolent characteristic, describing it as that which 'begins with a tickle and ends with a blaze of petrol' (Hewitson, 2015). *Jouissance* – as a negative entity – is discussed later in this chapter in relation to shell shock.

Despite – or because of – the loss of *jouissance*, the subject believes that full *jouissance*, or enjoyment, is possible to attain through the 'object a', as discussed in

Lacan's *Seminars X* (2014) and *XI,* (1981). The subject is driven by the belief that they can fill their sense of lack. It is through the splitting of the subject, because of symbolic castration, that *L'objet petit a* emerges, translated as 'object a'. Object a is the object cause of desire, which is any object that sets desire in motion – not a biological or instinctual need but a desire. *L'objet petit a* reflects a symbol of lack and acts as a compensatory substitute for symbolic castration, in addition to serving as a disruption of the fantasy of wholeness and unity in the mirror phase. *L'objet petit a* is not a desire for the object itself but the element in the object that they believe will satisfy their desire. Lacan likens it to an *agalma,* a precious thing unseen and unknown existing inside a box. It is not the box itself that is desired but what it may contain, which is assumed will fill the sense of lack in the subject. For Lacan, object a represents 'an unconscious clinging to an impossible desire that cannot be shared or satisfied' (Kirshner, 2005, p. 6). *L'objet petit a* is based on fantasy for the subject, of which there are four types: oral, anal, scopic and invocatory.

The three transitions of a child through the Oedipal phases are both elucidated by and correspond to the child's entry into the Symbolic register from the Imaginary register – two of three Lacanian registers, the third being the Real. Each stage will be outlined here as they are crucial in that they inform the social context of Sassoon's poetry. The Real is not reality and eludes any representation. It is in the first six months of the child's life that they are closest to the concept of the Real, which has no language and resists symbolisation. Felluga explains that:

> 'Lacan sometimes represents this state of nature as a time of fullness or completeness that is subsequently lost through the entrance into language […] the Real however continues to erupt whenever we are made to acknowledge the materiality of our existence, an acknowledgement that is usually perceived as traumatic' (Felluga, 2011).

However, the child gradually becomes aware of parts of itself, which moves it away from the register of the Real towards the Imaginary register: the domain of the ego, idealisations and identifications.

Lacan argues that 'the principal illusions of the Imaginary are those of wholeness, synthesis, autonomy, and duality, above all, similarity' (Lacan, 1956b, p. 269). Rosalind Minksy offers a more detailed description of the Imaginary register, noting the inherent narcissism of the child in this phase and the fact that the Imaginary register does not distinguish any difference. 'Objects in the Imaginary repeatedly reflect themselves in a kind of sealed unit where everything is an extension of the self, which has been projected onto the external world, so there are no apparent differences of divisions' (Minsky, 1996, p. 146). The Imaginary continues to exert its influence on individuals throughout life as they continue to identify with others, thus reducing difference to identification; this serves as a reassurance of their own identity, further contributing to the ideal ego and – in an unconscious quest – returning to the Imaginary state of primary narcissism. Following the Imaginary register is the mirror phase, where the subject begins to distinguish itself from another; this presents as an irrevocable split in the subject.

The mirror phase occurs between the ages of six and eighteen months whereby the child, upon recognition of its image in a reflection, initially confuses the image as separate to itself. The child has a sense of feeling physically fragmented because of the process of developing motor skills. However, the image the child sees reflected is one of coherent wholeness; this contrasts with their sense of fragmentation, thus resulting in a sense of alienation. The child, however, identifies with the perfect illusory specular image of the whole self. The 'ideal I' (or ego-ideal) of the subject forms at this point in an imaginary image of denial. 'The function of the ego is […] one of

misrecognition; of refusing to accept the truth of fragmentation and alienation' (Homer, 2005, p. 25). Lacan notes the prevalence of this stage, which will continue throughout life; it is 'a drama whose internal thrust is […] the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality' (Lacan, 1977, p. 4).

The whole coordinated image that the child sees in the mirror defies the child's sense of helplessness and conflicts with the fragmented sense of uncoordinated motor skills that the child feels in their body. The conflict between the body and the image is appeased by the child narcissistically identifying with the specular image. The mirror stage is not exclusively connected to the child's own reflection in the mirror. The child's identification with the specular image is further reinforced by others holding the child up to a mirror, encouraging identification – 'that is you', 'look at you', etc. – or in the child's observations of watching and responding to the caregiver. So, the misrecognition from the child is reinforced by others and the stable sense of I is confirmed as real. However, in this process of identification, there is a misrecognition – what Lacan calls *méconnaissance.* Klages explains that:

> 'The child takes that image in the mirror as the summation of its entire being, its "self." This process, of misrecognizing one's self in the image in the mirror, creates the ego, the thing that says "I" (Klages, 1997).

The image, identified as the ego, is in fact a fantasy – an identification with an external image. The ego, therefore, is an illusion; it 'is not a locus of autonomous agency, the seat of a free, true "I" determining its own fate' (Johnston, 2013). The mirror stage is therefore:

> 'a repository for the projected desires and fantasies of larger others. The child's image is a receptacle for his/her parents' dreams and wishes, with his/her body image being always-already overwritten by signifiers flowing from the libidinal economies of other speaking beings' (Johnston, A. 2013).

So, receiving other people's ideas contributes to constituting the ego, which is mistakenly conceived as being the self. The recognition from the child in the mirror positions the sense of self in an illusionary fixation that continues throughout life, with a sense of wholeness and a state of a unified self.

> 'Lacan says that the child's self-concept (its ego or "I"dentity) will never match up to its own being. The child, for the rest of its life, will misrecognize its self as other, as the image in the mirror that provides an illusion of self and of mastery' (Klages, 1997).

According to Lacan, this (mis)recognised state is compensatory for losing the original oneness we once shared with the mother's body. The fiction of the unified self protects us against the feeling of loss and sense of lack. However, since this misidentified sense of self is based on an illusion, the child is, and forever will be, alienated from it. As Barzilai states, 'The sense of alienation makes the self radically unstable, split, divided, ex-centric to itself' (Barzilai, 1999, p.105).

A feminist dynamic from Julia Kristeva's perspective complements and subsequently challenges Lacan by positing a crucial preceding stage before the mirror stage, between the ages of four and eight months, she suggests is a pre-linguistic stage referred to as the abject. A brief outline of the term abject is necessary here. On the one hand, the abject can be described as anything that induces a sense of horror and disgust in the self. The abject allows for differentiation between self and other. A second meaning of abjection is to be cast off or to reject something. Kristeva states that 'The abject is something so vile that I do not recognize it as a thing, I must violently reject it in order to assert myself as "I", and "Not that"' (Kristeva,1982, p.2). Clearly, the two meanings interrelate for Kristeva: the casting off is a result of the horror and disgust, and allows for a sense of otherness, which enables the subject to constitute itself. However, it is the definition of being cast off which is useful to focus on here.

Later in this chapter, I will also be discussing abjection in relation to horror and disgust conceptualised through Sassoon's reflections on soldiers.

> 'In this abject stage, the child establishes separation between the self and the maternal. Kristeva agrees with Lacan that this entails the distinction between the self and other. Kristeva further argues that once the child is separated from the mother at birth, this ultimately signifies that the mother is abjected which constitutes a form of matricide: in order for the child to transition through the imaginary, mirror and Symbolic realms, everything prior to this, i.e. feelings and desires, must be repressed. Essentially, Kristeva points out that the child must reject the mother figure (and implicitly the feminine) in order to enter the Symbolic realm, the domain of Lacan's Law of the Father, meaning society's laws' (McCormack, 2017, p.44).

It is from the mirror stage that the child enters the Symbolic register; as noted earlier, this is through the Name-of-the-Father. Entry into the Symbolic register marks the acceptance of society's rules and laws, and crucially its language. 'Once the child has the capacity for language, there is a qualitative change in his [or her] psychical structure – [they] […] become a subject' (Benvenuto et al., 1986, p. 131).

Crucially, at this point in the cementing of the self and other, begins Lacan's notion of the other. The concept of the other – in Lacanian terms – represents either the little other or the big Other, distinguished by capitalisation (Lacan, 1977, p. 292-325). The little other is defined by what the child sees during the mirror stage, and this forever remains part of the Imaginary register – an image of the ego as the ideal I. The specular image of the mirror phase, which as noted is a fantasy (one that the child sets up to compensate for its sense of lack), continues throughout adult life and is substituted by others we may wish to emulate. The others we emulate, like the child

in the mirror phase, are reflections and projections of one's ego; it is what we perceive to be true of other people with whom we share similar characteristics. There also exists the big Other, which signifies the Symbolic register, i.e. society's rules and laws that we live by. A secondary meaning to the big Other is another person who signifies radical difference – one that we cannot assimilate through identification due to significant alterity and unassimilable uniqueness (Evans, 1998, p.136). However, this meaning can only exist if the subject is already located in the Symbolic register and has the language to identify the Other.

With some key ideas from Lacan now explained, I will go on to show how the concepts of the other, desire and the mirror phase, are all evident in Sassoon's poetry. However, I begin with the social context of the recruitment campaign and the posters used in WW1. Although Sassoon was not living in London during the recruitment campaign, he had spent three months there from May to July of 1914 prior to the outbreak of the war on 4th August. Furthermore, he would have internalised the social climate that led up to the war. The pressure to join the war effort is reflected in Sassoon's biography: 'It was almost a relief to learn from a visiting family friend, Mab Anley – the mother of two colonels on the Active Service List – that war was unavoidable and that young men were needed to fight in it' (Moorcroft-Wilson, 2013, p. 103). Various posters depicted the ideal male image, which represented the ideal I: a projection of the warrior soldier, the epitome of hypermasculinity to men. The poster recruitment campaign can be interpreted utilising Lacan's mirror stage.

The illusory sense of self in the Lacanian mirror phase is a precondition for communication with other people; it is a necessary misidentification in order to enter the Symbolic register. In much the same way that the child identifies with the image in the mirror phase, misrecognising itself and identifying the image with the ego, it could

be said that men too identified, that is projected, their ego onto the hypermasculine image that the posters used in the army recruitment campaign. The images of hypermasculinity posited an illusory construct, designed and promoted by the big Other (society) that potential recruits (mis)identified with. The posters constituted an ideal ego for men with an image that provided 'an illusion of self and of mastery' (Klages, 1997) – an aspirational image for men to identify with. As Johnston states, there was in play, as in the mirror stage, 'an alienating foreign introject through which I am seduced and subjected by others' conscious and unconscious wants and machinations' (Johnston, 2014). In other words, the ego, is influenced and susceptible to interaction with others. I therefore suggest that the posters acted as a model of interaction with the potential recruits.

The plethora of posters at the time functioned in a panoptic way; men had the feeling of being watched. One civilian commented, in 1916, that the 'Kitchener's Army recruiting poster invited men to "enlist for the duration of the war." This phrase, shouting out from every available wall-space, gradually came to affect all of us subconsciously' (Arnot, 1916, p. 7). In an ironic turn for patriarchy, the posters' images lured men to question their fragile senses of masculinity. An additional reading of the posters in the dynamic of the gaze saw the recruitment posters act as signifiers of the imaginary phallus as well as the desire of the other to which men aspired – to be the phallus for the mother. As critics have pointed out, the concept of the phallus as a signifier is fluid: 'other symbols of the imaginary phallus are the breast, the voice, the gaze, fragments and slits of the body, scents and so on' (Ragaland-Sullivan, 1991, p. 61). The posters of the war, therefore, set up a notion of the phallus as a signifier of masculinity, in addition to the imaginary phallus. Either reading inextricably links the phallus to the penis and, therefore, to masculinity.

Lacan argues that the phallus is not simply another phrase for the penis; it is 'the penis plus the recognition of absence or lack' (Homer, 2005, p. 56). In 'The Meaning of the Phallus', Lacan declares that the phallus 'is even less the organ, penis or clitoris that it symbolises' (Lacan, 1977, p. 285). Still, it is never wholly clear in his writing when he is referring to the phallus as imaginary or real; this, as some critics have pointed out, suggests the 'instability of the phallus as a signifier where it collapses into the site of regression towards the biological organ' (Macey, 1988, p. 191). Kaja Silverman notes how the inextricable link between the penis and the phallus creates an illusion of power for men and that 'the ideological equation of penis and phallus is the "dominant fiction" through which masculinity defines itself' (Silverman, 1992, p. 16). The construction of masculinity relies upon having (as opposed to not having) a phallus. In the hierarchal male/female set-up that is particularly evident in the Symbolic register, the phallus signifier is part of hierarchical binary opposites: male and female, or masculine and feminine, presence and emptiness. The possession of a phallus offers capital to men in the Symbolic order and explicates gender inequality in society. However, Lacan observes and comments on the phallus as a function in society as opposed to ascribing its function:

> 'Lacan's most direct exposition of the status of the phallus in the psychoanalytic account of sexuality […] avoids reducing it to the biological difference between the sexes, but which none the less tries to provide a differential account, for men and for women of its effects' (Mitchell and Rose, 1982, p. 74).

What is hard to deny, from the above discussion, is that lacking the phallus equals the Other – the very other that the army played upon in its recruitment campaign, setting men not against women, but against themselves and their masculinity.

As previously explained, Lacan refers to the Symbolic register as our entry into language through the mirror phase, cited as the big Other, i.e. society's rules and laws.

It is separate from us and already existing and we must exist within it: ‘a circuit of discourse, where the subject is constituted’ (Homer, 2005, p. 44). Lacan claims that ‘symbols, in fact, envelop the life of man in a network so total that they join together before he comes into the world, those who are going to engender him’ (Lacan, 1956, p. 42). Lacan suggests that it is in this system of symbols that we are constituted: ‘man speaks, therefore, but it is because the symbol has made him a man’ (Lacan, 1956, p. 39). Our stage costumes and our roles of either gender therefore already exist. We simply must play the part to assimilate ourselves successfully into the Symbolic register. The war meant learning a whole new set of codes of behaviour – even a new language with its reliance on slang constituting a new performance.

Leaving behind civilian life and joining the army was equivalent to a re-enactment of entry to the Symbolic register and acceptance to the Name-of-the-Father. Men had to accept and submit to new rules and regulations upon enrolment, which included new behavioural norms and values, in order to perform as a soldier with bravery and self-sacrifice in the hypermasculine arena. *The Officer’s Manual of the Western Front, 1914 -1918* (Bull, 2008) acted as the Name-of-the-Father in accompanying entry into the new Symbolic register of the military. The manual consists of 150 pages of instructions to transition recruits from the civilian to the military world. *The Officer’s Manual* illustrates the need for competition and even explains how to act, stating that ‘each section should consider itself the best section in the platoon and the best platoon in the battalion’ (Bull, 2008, p. 123). Later, the army manual explicitly states the role of competitions: ‘Each form of instruction should be made the subject of competition, from saluting and clean turn-out up to musketry, accuracy of rifle bombs, scouting, sniping etc., etc.’ (Bull, 2008, p. 125). Finally, there are specific instructions for commanders, which include ‘being bloodthirsty, and forever thinking of

how to kill the enemy, and helping his men to do so […] being the best man at arms […] being quick to act […] Be just but do not be soft – men despise softness' (Bull, 2008, p. 126). The army manual effectively set out the ideal I of hypermasculinity, working to complement the war posters, and set up the masculine ideal that men were expected to aspire towards; men were, in effect, encouraged to perform a masquerade.

In Joan Riviere's paper, 'Womanliness as Masquerade' (1929), the idea of the masquerade was posed as a polemic response to an earlier paper by Ernest Jones titled 'Early Development of Female Sexuality' (1927). Jones posited that the idea of female sexual development rested on two contingencies: 'normal' heterosexual and homosexual, the latter being women who sought recognition for their masculinity from men. Riviere, however, suggested that women who aspired towards masculine pursuits aroused fear and anxiety in men. As a result, and to protect men, thus enabling them to sustain their masculinity, women donned a metaphorical mask. 'Women who wish for masculinity may put on a mask of womanliness to avert anxiety, and the retribution feared from men' (Riviere, 1929, p. 302). The theory of masquerade implies a fragile collective sense of male dominance, which in turn implies the fragility of patriarchy; it implicitly suggests that the concept of masculinity is fragile, propped up by women being positioned as the other, who in turn collude by masquerade.

Men and women adhere to oppressive gender identities, dictated by phallocentric social codes of expected gender behaviours; gender thus becomes a performance which sustains patriarchal power and favourable conditions for men. Women and men act in ways expectant of each other; in this respect, gender is a construction perpetuated by performance. However, there is a subversive element to the performance of gender. Women are aware of their performance to protect men's

fragile sense of masculinity, which in turn is bolstered by the act of femininity. The phallocentric order of dominance is perpetuated by each gender. But if gender is a performance, then unequal gender identities in a patriarchal society is an illusion, based upon acts of performing phallocentric driven acts of gender. Women's conscious acts of performance of femininity on the one hand support patriarchy but equally also subvert male dominance, in that the performance from women is a deliberate, conscious act. Beyond the mask of femininity is the acknowledgment of masquerade and implicitly the realisation of illusionary unequal gender identities, dictated by social conditions, which reveals that gender is nothing more than a construct.

Luce Irigaray captures the essence of the masquerade of women: 'They put on their make-up and their beautiful clothes; they flirt, they act gracefully, they play. They perform their little trickery to be liked, be successful, achieve their goals' (Whitford, 1991, p. 78). Sassoon, too, put on a uniform – the uniform of the soldier; he was assigned a rank and temporarily played a part, rehearsing through training and aspiring to the goal of the ideal I of hypermasculinity in the war. Paul Fussell (2000) points out that 'the wearing of costumes […] augments the sense of the theatrical. […]' (p. 191-192).

Judith Butler's work on gender contributes to Riviere's notion of masquerade, which leads to an understanding of Sassoon's conciliation of soldier and poet, and pertinently to his performance in the war. Butler suggests that 'gender is an impersonation […] Becoming gendered involves impersonating an ideal that nobody actually inhabits' (Kotz, 1992). Butler further notes that a person is innately ungendered yet through social conditioning, social recognition becomes gendered. A clear link can be established here between Butler's ideas and Adler's concept of

masculine protest, and also Freud's Totemism, in reference to the primacy of the male. Butler suggets that gender is a social role performed, in effect, as a 'stylized repetition of acts' that constitute impersonation and performance in a world where everyone is assumed to be heterosexual (Butler, 1990). The army manual presented these subtly idealised acts in the heterosexual matrix of war in which Sassoon performed.

The idea of masquerade and its relation to gender is demonstrated through Daniel Schreber's *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, published in 1903, on which Freud wrote his commentary in 1911. Schreber recalls a significant episode:

> 'One morning while still in bed (whether still half asleep or already awake, I cannot remember) I had a feeling which, thinking about it later when fully awake, struck me as highly peculiar. It was the idea that it really must be rather pleasant to be a woman succumbing to intercourse' (Schreber, 2000, p.63).

Freud interprets Schreber's quote as a wish fulfilment of a homosexual desire – a process of projections that constitute Schreber's paranoid delusions to defend against homosexuality.

> 'I (a man) love him (a man)," is negated into "I do not love him – I hate him," which then, as a result of projection, becomes "He hates (persecutes) me,' and from this the paranoiac derives the justification, "I do not love him – I hate him – because he persecutes me" (Freud, 1911, p. 62).

However, I believe that there is much more at stake in Schreber's semi-conscious reflection and Freud's analysis that leads to a reading of how masquerade works for masculinity. On the one hand, Schreber stands as the high court judge – an archetypal masculine figure; on the other hand, his fantasy of being penetrated situates him as the antithesis of stereotyped maleness.

Schreber presents what Eve Kosofsky calls homosexual panic, where there is a blurring of social expectations regarding masculinity whereby men transgress

fraternal bonds and become sexually interested in other men (Sedgwick, 1985, p, 89). What further happens at this point in Schreber's memoir is the acknowledgement of the demarcation of gender identities, male and female. Schreber's homosexual desire is couched in a female body, with connotations of submission, which implicitly rejects the idea of the male body being penetrated and thus equating masculinity with submission, much like the discussion in chapter one of Sassoon's poem, 'The Kiss'. What differentiates the discussion between the earlier analysis of the Kiss and the argument here is the focus on the body and the idea of performance. Schreber notes:

> 'I became clearly aware that the Order of Things imperatively demanded my emasculation […] no reasonable course lay open to me but to reconcile myself to the thought of being transformed into a woman' (Freud, 1911, p.19).

Schreber alludes indirectly to masquerade, with a transsexual wish fulfilment as opposed to homosexual wish fulfilment, that Freud suggests. Schreber states his fantasy of penetration within 'the Order of Things' – in other words, a phallocentric, heterocentric society. From a Lacanian perspective, the Symbolic register of signs that we enter into and perform our gendered roles.

Eric Santner encapsulates the demands of society to perform gender, in relation to Schreber:

> 'The (repetitive) demand to live in conformity with the social essence with which one has been invested, and thus to stay on the proper side of a socially consecrated boundary, is one that is addressed not only or even primarily to the mind or intellect, but to the body'. (Santner, 1996, p.12).

When Santner refers to the 'proper side of a socially consecrated boundary', he alludes to the idea of conformity, of situating oneself in the Symbolic register with expected gender behaviours. He points out that Schreber's delusions could be read as a driving 'imperative to produce a regulated series of repeat performances' (p. 124),

that is, the expectation to perform expected masculinity in a phallocentric society – a culture that privileges men over women.

Santner's perspective echoes that of Butler, with gender as a performance that is situated in the body and performed as an act. Schreber's psychosis could then be interpreted as a refusal to align with masculinity but because of the Symbolic register, he must align himself to the female sex to 'stay on the proper side of a socially consecrated boundary' in a heterocentric society. Schreber forgoes his masculinity, or what Kristeva would describe as a process of abjection, 'with his own body and ego as the most precious non-objects; they are no longer seen in their own right but forfeited and therefore abject' (Kristeva, 1982, p.5). Schreber's case therefore points towards the rigid demarcation of gender inscribed in society, and in language and the consequences of resistance to this, which in Schreber's case leads to psychosis.

Crucially, as seen from the Schreber case, it is the body that is inscribed in this social order, from the evidence of Schreber's perspective. The ego, specifically a body ego, and masquerade are interlinked. From a Freudian perspective, Schreber's desires indicate a bodily ego: In *The Ego and the Id* (1923), Freud attempts to trace the formation of the ego as: 'first and foremost a bodily ego' that is, 'not merely a surface entity, but…itself the projection of a surface'. In a footnote added in 1927, Freud further explains that 'the ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body. It may thus be regarded as a mental projection of the surface of the body' (Freud, 1923, p.25).

In the Schreber case, he finds a release for his desire in transsexualism. It is a masquerade, for Schreber, in its extremity – transsexualism is the only 'reasonable course (that) lay open' to him. The body in this reading is a signifier of cultural

heteronormativity. Furthermore, what Schreber's case indicates is the idea of gender as a performance, and consequently the idea of categorising the self as either male or female, complying with the social expectations in which the binary genders are entrenched.

If the ego is an illusory identification, as Lacan insists, a misrecognition of an image, then it could be argued that the body ego also identifies with physical gender. Lacan states that 'in the psyche, there is nothing by which the subject may situate himself as a male or female being' (Lacan, 1977, p.204). It is only in the Symbolic register that an individual can situate themselves as either female or male, through differentiation from the other, through language. Therefore, a man or woman, due to the cultural codes of the Symbolic register, identifies and mimics a behaviour that is aligned with the culturally appropriate gender.

The psychoanalyst Donald Moss approaches the idea of masquerade from a contemporary perspective. He states that men are:

> 'always susceptible to the accusation that their version of "masculinity" is a masquerade.' In trying to think one's way into what "masculinity" might mean, one drifts toward an image of an original figure. After that come all the rest, the followers. And he is, I think, without exception, caught in the act' (Moss, 2012, p.8).

Moss alludes to the idea of mimicry, he suggests, with the idea of an original figure, the historical, mimicking, mirroring behaviour, which constitutes an act in the body in clear reference to Butler's argument. However, the psychical consequences of the mimicked behaviour are also alluded to when Moss shares an insightful anecdote from one of his patients, which expresses the difficulty of performing masculinity. 'Fuck you. I hate you. Fuck you. I love you. You can't be a man if you don't love men. You can't be a man if you do love men' (Moss, 2012, p.8). The quote from Moss's patient is reminiscent of Freud's interpretation of Schreber's case, of a defence system against

homosexuality, but here sexuality and gender are combined. It is this image of what constitutes being a man that Sassoon explores and challenges in his poetry.

The idea of masquerade works together within readings of Sassoon's poetry with the ego. One critic points out the false sense of self from the Lacanian mirror phase:

> 'The ego's sense of self is based on the illusions of wholeness and coherence that are the product of the Imaginary function, and it is the task of psychoanalysis, counter to psychology, to destabilize, decentre, displace such conceptions, and, in that process, the subject must take responsibility for his unconscious subjectivity' (Oyer, 2016, p45).

I suggest that the de-centring and destabilisation of the ego is what Sassoon shows through his poetry. Considering the idea put forward in chapter one – the dual position of Sassoon as actor and spectator – the split self from a Lacanian perspective is evident and the ego can now be interpreted as the actor, the object, while the spectator is the subject. Sassoon, through this dual perspective, goes on to explore how masculinity is a construct, a performance, dictated by the big Other. In the case of WW1, this was the government dictating what they expected from men as soldiers, and the public perception at the time of men and their duty as soldiers.

Sassoon reveals the militarily codified expectations of hypermasculinity and goes beyond the mask of this construct to reveal the masquerade performed by men conceptualised through a military lens, through a deconstruction of the role of the soldier. It was through masquerade and performance that Sassoon attempted a reconciliation of the split between the poet and the soldier, which resulted in the denial – or repression – of any pacifist feelings he may have had; instead, these were replaced with his 'Mad Jack' persona. Sassoon's alter-ego was a manifestation of the idealised war hero: 'He relished the need to take risks […] he made no effort to protect

himself and went out on raiding parties whenever possible, a military equivalent of Russian roulette' (Moorcroft-Wilson, 2013 p. 147). It was during Sassoon's experience in the Somme summer offensive, while part of a raiding party, where, amidst enemy fire, he went to find his comrades on three separate occasions (Hart-Davies, 1983, p. 66). His actions, however reckless, earned him the Military Cross for Bravery. Sassoon was aware of his act: 'Oh God, when shall I ever get out of this limbo? […] never my old self – always acting a part – that of the cheery reckless sportsman' (Hart-Davies, 1983, p. 94).

Faced with a situational context of heightened masculinity in the war, Sassoon donned a mask of heteronormative hypermasculinity upon enrolling in the army, stepping into and performing a role that effectively pre-existed him – one that was already constructed by society, that of the ideal masculine warrior. The ideal masculinity confronted Sassoon on a double front: firstly, his role of a man in civilian society, and secondly, as a parody of the man presented by the hypermasculinity of the war. The soldier's uniform, the displays of courage, the obsession with his fetish, guns, and the deflection of his desire for other men were all portrayed in some of his poems, as discussed in Chapter Two. These elements also contributed to the sense of masquerade, of playing the role, for Sassoon. The performance was an attempt by Sassoon to assimilate himself into military life and fulfil the hypermasculinity required. However, it served Sassoon to don a mask of hypermasculinity, to protect the heteronormative valued narcissism and protect the internal prohibited other within him: the pacifist poet and the homosexual, the aspects of himself which were marginalised by society, which can effectively be deemed as other.

Julia Kristeva's definition of the term 'other' is useful to explore here as it offers a complementary approach to Lacan's and allows a further reading of Sassoon's

poetry. For Kristeva, the other refers to the figure of difference as it is alienated and excluded to the point of limiting any possible relation to the 'self' (1991). She argues that the fear of 'others' is a projection of fear that stems from our sense of strangeness. As with the fear of the uncanny in Freud's essay, Kristeva argues that people are afraid of an external 'other' because it serves as a substitute for something that they have repressed.

Kristeva refers to Freud's writing on the uncanny who suggested that the uncanny is 'in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old-established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression' (Freud, 1919, p. 240). Kristeva adds that the uncanny brings an unsettling recognition of the subject's own strangeness, which highlights the otherness from within and results in the 'immanence of the strange within the familiar' (Kristeva, 1991, p.183). Kristeva suggests that Freud's uncanny 'teaches us how to detect foreignness in ourselves […] the only way not to hound it outside of us' (Kristeva, 1991, p.191). So, from the Kristevan reading of Freud, we must accept the strangeness within ourselves to accept the strangeness from outside. Sassoon's poetry is situated in the uncanny, in the landscape of war and with interactions with other soldiers; however, because of the environment of war, soldiers take on uncanny guises, unrecognisable as men, reduced to states of radical alterity in Sassoon's descriptions. Sassoon's environment and interactions with soldiers suggest an otherness that Sassoon could not or would not assimilate.

Kristeva goes further in her exploration of the concept of other and argues that

> 'the archaic, narcissistic self, not yet demarcated by the outside world, projects out of itself what it experiences as dangerous or unpleasant in itself, making of it an alien double, uncanny and demonical. In this instance, the strange appears as a defence put up by a distraught self' (Kristeva, 1991, p.183).

Kristeva's notion of the self 'not yet demarcated' points toward the Lacanian pre-mirror phase before the child is aware of itself separate from others and crucially before entry into the symbolic register of language which will engender them. It is this state that Sassoon reminisces about in his poems that reflect the romanticised past in the context of the war. Kristeva goes on to suggest that accepting and reconciling the uncanny other within the self results in the unravelling of identity: '*a destructuration of the self*' […] it surely manifests the return of a familiar repressed, the *Unheimliche*' (Kristeva, 1991, p.188). Therefore, through Kristeva's reading, acceptance of the other within the self would mean the subject facing a loss of identity. So, the uncanniness of the other if accepted, or even if rejected, still suggests an acknowledgement of the other, which in turn shatters the illusion of the wholeness conceived in the Imaginary register and the mirror phase. There is in fact an other – and in recognition of this, we face the reality that we face acceptance of our lack. It is precisely this acknowledgement and struggle of acceptance of lack that Sassoon's poetry explores. The imagined unity of the Lacanian mirror phase is cast into doubt by the war with masculinity subsequently is questioned by Sassoon, which leads to a sense at best of fractured masculine identity, and at other times a total sense of abject horror in his descriptions of soldiers.

Performance and the notion of the other combine from a Kristevan perspective. In *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991), Kristeva discusses 'the foreigner' and suggests that the figure oscillates between courage and humiliation, engaged in a 'secret working out' (Kristeva, 1991, p.8). In much the same way, Sassoon has the foreigner or stranger within presented as the soldier. As shown in chapter one, Sassoon's poetry proves the 'working out' of passed repressed oedipal conflicts, further demonstrated through his reflections in the act of writing his poetry. Sassoon's writing also shows

the courage and the humiliation demonstrated in the dichotomy within his poetry, where courage manifests in his alter-ego of Mad Jack, driven by performance. Kristeva's description of the 'foreigner' further encapsulates the dichotomy present in Sassoon's writing:

> 'Without a home, he disseminates, on the contrary, the actor's paradox: multiplying masks and 'false selves' he is never completely true nor completely false, as he is able to tune in to loves and aversions the superficial antennae of a basaltic heart. A headstrong will, but unaware of itself, unconscious, distraught. The breed of the tough guys who know how to be weak' (Kristeva, 1991. p8).

Through reference to the actor, Kristeva suggests that there is no concept of the self in the foreigner but that they are pawns that don masks in a performance. Sassoon certainly performs the hypermasculine soldier; however, behind the mask there is the poet, and it is between these two aspects that Sassoon's writing evidences a psychical conflict. Indeed, Sassoon's loves and aversions stem from the very spilt of soldier and poet, presented through past and present, the abject and the romanticised, and further through spectator and actor as illustrated in chapter one.

Kristeva's imagery of a 'basaltic heart' on the one hand verges on 'othering' foreigners, in reference to the exotic volcanic stone. An alternative perspective suggests the sense of estrangement from within oneself in an alien environment. The basaltic heart reference also infers, alongside the role of the actor, the emptiness of the self, and a reliance on others to define oneself. (Basaltic rock forms from remnants of other melting rocks.) Sassoon's performance as a soldier is defined by the Other – that is, society telling him how to perform in war.

The role of society coupled with the formation of Sassoon's ego, as noted in chapter one, influenced by a range of male and female tutors, contributed to his conflicted duality of self. The imaginary register continues to exert its influence on the

ego as he continues to defy the fragmented self of the mirror stage by introjecting others. Regarding the 'tough guy' and recognition of weakness, these traits are revealed in Sassoon's poetry through the alter-ego of 'Mad Jack', satisfying the Other (society's) desire.

The dialect of desire and the deconstruction of the heroic image of the soldier, reduced to the status of other, are prevalent themes throughout Sassoon's poetry. In Sassoon's 'The Hero' (1965, p. 29), he describes a letter given to a mother about the death of her son. The mother laments his sacrifice in the war. The poem also symbolically reflects the first separation of the mother and son from Lacan's three-time Oedipal complex. It also reflects the second moment of the Oedipal phase as the sergeant – a figure of authority – personifies the Name-of-the-Father; it takes the prohibition of 'no' to the extreme in telling of the son's death, which irreversibly ends the relationship between the mother and the son. Desire here has been prohibited, which only serves to make it more powerful and desirable, thus resulting in perpetuating desire.

> '"Jack fell as he'd have wished,"' the mother said,
> And folded up the letter that she'd read.
> She half looked up. "We mothers are so proud
> Of our dead soldiers." Then her face was bowed.
> […]
> Quietly the Brother Officer went out.
> He'd told the poor old dear some gallant lies.
> That she would nourish all her days, no doubt
> For while he coughed and mumbled, her weak eyes
> Had shone with gentle triumph, brimmed with joy
> Because he'd been so brave, her glorious boy.
> He thought how "Jack", cold-footed, useless swine,
> Had panicked down the trench that night the mine
> Went up at Wicked Corner; how he'd tried
> To get sent home, and how, at last, he died.'

The soldier of the poem serves to contrast the perceived and the real images of war from the mother and the officer, respectively. It is the stage direction given on the departure of the officer – reflecting on 'gallant lies' – that leads to Sassoon's cruel but perhaps realistic commentary that conflicts with the sentimentality of the soldier as a hero. What the officer reflects instead is the mother's son as an incompetent, frightened and desperate man. The contrast highlights the notion of Lacan's concept of the big Other, substituted here as the mother and her desire to glorify soldiers in a social form of compensating for their weaknesses. Once more, we see the notion of women propping up masculinity, as noted in chapter one: the officer, reflected in the mother's gaze, colludes with this notion and satisfies her desire in the process. However, the officer hints at the illusion of sustaining the heroic image of the soldier, revealed subtly in the lines, 'For while he coughed and mumbled, her weak eyes. /Had shone with gentle triumph, brimmed with joy' (p. 29). It is only in a private soliloquy – beginning 'he thought how Jack' – that the officer refutes the heroic image of the dead son. In doing so, the officer deconstructs the perceived image of the hero soldier and breaks the illusion created by the desire-dialect. What the officer presents instead of the hero is a masculine parody of the mother's perception of her son – the hero. Masculinity here is shown to be a façade – a construct made up and sustained in the desire of the other. The soldier is immortalised as the object of desire by the mother – a desire that is shattered by the officer in his recognition of a lack in remembering the facts about the son. By naming the ironic hero Jack, this suggests that there is a projection of Sassoon's alter-ego here. As noted earlier, Sassoon's name in the War was 'Mad Jack': a reference to his fears sublimated in the poem of not living up to the publicly portrayed image of the warrior soldier.

Sassoon's poetry indicates the notion of desire not being satisfied. There is a continual theme present of insatiate desire, driven by dissatisfaction, producing further desires to fill the sense of not having achieved *jouissance*. The notions of Butler's performativity and Lacan's phallic *jouissance* are echoed in Richard Dyer's description of an ideal of masculinity as something that can never be achieved, personified by Sassoon in the War. 'The clenched fist, the bulging muscles, the hardened jaws, the proliferation of phallic symbols – all straining after what can hardly ever be achieved, the embodiment of phallic mystique' (Dyer, 1982, p. 72). Phallic *jouissance* is of interest if one is considering Sassoon to be driven by castration anxiety, defending his masculinity, all if the phallus is taken as a signifier for masculinity and demonstrated in his 'Mad Jack' performance. However, the desire to live up to the performance of hypermasculinity was not met, and the result consequently leads to phallic *jouissance*.

Robert Graves, in *Goodbye to All That*, predicted Sassoon's turn of writing from phantasised patriotic zeal to realism: 'Siegfried had not yet been in the trenches. I told him, in my old-soldier manner, that he would soon change his style' (Graves, 1929, p. 174). It is this turn of style in the two poems – 'Absolution' and 'Survivors' – that further elucidates my arguments of failed desires and failed *jouissance.* In 'Absolution', Sassoon writes about war as an obligation – a cause of necessary suffering – that liberates men who are bound in a brotherhood towards a common goal of patriotism:

> 'The anguish of the earth absolves our eyes
> Till beauty shines in all that we can see.
> War is our scourge; yet war has made us wise,
> And, fighting for our freedom, we are free.
> […]
> And loss of things desired; all these must pass.
> We are the happy legion, for we know
> […]
> Now, having claimed this heritage of heart,
> What need we more, my comrades and my brothers?' (Sassoon, 1961, p. 11).

The lines contrast with ‘Survivors’ and the reality of the war, presenting an Other brotherhood, a collective group of shell-shocked soldiers:

> ‘No doubt they’ll soon get well; the shock and strain
> Have caused their stammering, disconnected talk.
> Of course they’re “longing to go out again,” –
> These boys with old, scared faces, learning to walk.
> They’ll soon forget their haunted nights; their cowed
> Subjection to the ghosts of friends who died, –
> Their dreams that drip with murder; and they’ll be proud’
> (Sassoon, 1961, p. 90).

The patriotic pride seen in ‘Absolution’ is now replaced with ‘shatter’d pride’; ambitions now revealed as a phantasy. The brotherhood has been shattered through the death of comrades, now ‘ghosts of friends who died’ in nightmares that they are subjected to. There is no sense of absolution. Instead, there is resonant guilt seen in ‘dreams that drip with murder’, justified only by a frame of pride. The soldiers are no longer men but now child-like. Learning to talk and walk, they are far from free as they set out. Instead, they are by contrast dependent, in the childlike status that Sassoon depicts, and transformed from ‘wise’ to ‘scared’. The soldiers’ unremitting desires are ‘longing to go out again’.

In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan notes that drives can never be satisfied. He states that desire does not aim at an object but rather circles perpetually around it; there is no final destination – this is the source of *jouissance*. In this case, desire – positioned as a drive or ‘manifestations of a single force called desire’ – circles around the object of desire, aiming towards *jouissance* (Evans, 1996, p.38). Desire is then never fulfilled, as seen in the soldiers’ ‘longing’. There has been no ‘Loss of things desired’, as stated in ‘Absolution’. Instead, the illusion of fulfilment or *jouissance* remained at least for some of the soldiers.

Sassoon continues his critique of the public perception of the solider in ‘The Glory of Women’. The poem portrays the women as sadistic voyeurs, with little – if any – compassion or sense of reality for soldiers in the war. In ‘The Glory of Women’, the dyad between the soldiers – positioned as objects of desire in the women’s eyes – also aimed at women, using a critique of the pleasure that women take in soldiers’ injuries:

> ‘You love us when we’re heroes, home on leave,
> Alternatively, wounded in a mentionable place.
> […]
> You worship decorations; you believe
> That chivalry redeems the war’s disgrace.
> You make us shells. You listen with delight.
> By tales of dirt and danger fondly thrilled
> […]
> And mourn our laurelled memories when we’re killed.
> You can’t believe that British troops “retire”
> When hell’s last horror breaks them, and they run,
> Trampling the terrible corpses – blind with blood.
> O German mother dreaming by the fire,
> While you are knitting socks to send your son
> His face is trodden deeper in the mud’
> (Sassoon, 1961, p. 79).

The poem takes an erotic turn. The first two lines hint at the idea that wounded soldiers are ‘in a mentionable place’. Still, even while they are symbolically castrated, the soldiers are objectified: perceived as objects of desire, emphasised by the ‘tales of dirt and danger fondly thrilled’ – an allusion to the idea of heroism – and implicitly positioning the soldiers in the position of the eroticised other. Sassoon comments on the contradiction demanded of men in war by using the word ‘chivalry’: they are gentlemen yet also courageous and expected to fight and kill, all driven by the women’s desires, which have an active part in upholding the ideal construct: ‘you make us shells’. Men are shown as being constructed through desire in a contradictory

idealness that acts as a veil to the horror of the war where ‘chivalry redeems the war’s disgrace’.

The direct address is used again when the authoritative narrator announces, ‘You can't believe that British troops “retire”’. The emphasis of ‘retire’ through the use of speech marks acts as a euphemism for soldiers that have left the war early, referring to them being discharged, since nobody would ‘retire’. The accusatory disbelief of the women suggests that there is no obvious physical trauma to justify ‘retirement’. The line, therefore, offers an oblique suggestion towards a non-physical wound, an emotional trauma, i.e. shell shock – a diagnosis not celebrated as being heroic like a physical wound nor mourned with ‘laurelled memories’ of death. The emotional wound is met simply with a general feeling of disbelief and bewilderment that ‘British troops could “retire”’. A stark image is offered to the reader to convey the truth of war and contributes towards an understanding of why ‘troops “retire”’: ‘When hell’s last horror breaks them, and they run, /Trampling the terrible corpses – blind with blood.’ Then, men are ‘broken’ but, not physically maimed; they run, blind not because of their wounds, but because of the blood from others covering the fields, as they trample, cattle-like, over bodies to escape the ‘horror’. The fact that Sassoon chooses to emphasise nationality with British troops evokes the British emblems described in the war posters: the valour, courage, and hypermasculinity imposed upon men. The British perspective contrasts with the last line with the ‘German mother dreaming by the fire’, whom it seems does not celebrate, revel in, or promote the same heroically-infused British values. Medals here are less important; rather she has a practical understanding of the soldiers’ conditions as she banally knits socks for her son. Meanwhile, ‘His face is trodden deeper in the mud’, trampled on by the British troops in their frenzied escape, which Sassoon reiterates in the final lines of ‘War’s disgrace’.

In ‘They’, a generically titled poem suggestive of ‘otherness’, Sassoon offers a further polemic on masculinity and refutes the image of the heroic soldier, portraying instead a catalogue of symbolically castrated men. Sassoon is the passive spectator in the poem, eavesdropping on a conversation between civilians, littered with the matter of fact dialect firstly through a first name roll-call, where the soldiers are glibly reduced to various states of symbolic castration.

> ‘For George lost both his legs; and Bill’s stone blind;
> Poor Jim's shot through the lungs and like to die;
> And Bert's gone syphilitic: you’ll not find
> A chap who’s served that hasn’t found some change
> And the Bishop said: “The ways of God are strange”’
> (Sassoon, 1961, p. 23).

The final line of comic relief satirises the Bishop and offers a subtle attack on religion, bringing Sassoon's poem to the level of a critique of society. Men are objectified by other men this time but not as erotic objects as in ‘The Glory of Women’. Rather this time, the men are dysfunctional: not able to walk, see, breathe properly or, finally, even think properly with syphilis leading to madness (a subtle reference to shell shock). The final line shows the impact of the war upon men with the all-encompassing verb ‘change’. The wounded men are compared to the civilians who are essentially physically and emotionally healthy; they are the objects of desire that the wounded soldiers are compared to. Through this comparison, the soldiers are assigned the status of other as dysfunctional to society in war.

In each of the above poems – ‘The Hero’, ‘The Glory of Women’ and ‘They’ – the soldiers portrayed are judged on their performance in the war; the signifier of a soldier leads to the signification of masculinity. Sassoon, as the spectator and poet, can reflect and arbitrate on society’s view of the soldier from a detached position, satirising and subverting society’s image of the hero soldier. Sassoon offers a rejection

of the public image of the masculine war hero and this goes some way towards the deconstruction of masculinity, describing it as consisting of lack and implicitly offering an argument towards the construction of masculinity in the war that he rejects. The men, as observed by Sassoon in the above poems, are reduced to the status of other: firstly the big Other in their radical alterity from the men in 'They' and 'The Hero', and from the women – the small other – in their sexual objectification and subversion of the male/female binary. Sassoon's diary entries offer more evidence of the Otherness of soldiers, who he describes as 'inhuman forms going to and from inhuman tasks' (Hart-Davies, 1983, p. 20) – an allusion to how the context of war shaped the nature of men. Sassoon subverts the 'physical strength and beauty, an important ideal of pre-war masculine identity' (Mosse, 1996, p. 19). Through the metaphorical castration that occurs in the poems, men are emasculated; they are of no use in the war. Bearing in mind that the image of the soldier as noted in the recruitment campaign was one of wholeness, and that ideal masculinity is prescribed by the big Other (society, the War Office), Sassoon's poems on castration offer a damning critique on the big Other.

From a further Lacanian interpretation of the above poems, 'The Hero', 'The Glory of Women' and 'They', the soldiers have now been positioned in relation to the phallus in the Symbolic register; they are derogatively judged by their masculinity. Furthermore, elucidation of the poems comes from Lacan's notion of having the phallus or being the phallus, explained in the 'Signification of the Phallus' (Lacan, 1999b, p. 575-584).

> 'One can occupy a "male" position in relation to the phallus (having the phallus), or one can occupy a "feminine" position by attempting to "be" the phallus, in the minimal sense of "being an object of desire for the Other". Lacan insists that the "male" and "female" relations to the phallus can be adopted by either biological sex, and that the real meaning of sexual difference is to be found in a structural asymmetry between these relations. If one becomes a "subject of desire" one can

> never *be* the phallus, while if one becomes an "object of desire", one relinquishes one's position as a "subject"' (Hallward; Kerslake, 2012).

Therefore, the phallus positioned as a signifier and subject of desire equates to 'I desire': the object of desire is to be desired. Considering Lacan's notion, the soldiers are in a feminine position in that they are objects of desire for the other, eroticised by the women in the poem 'The Glory of Women', where the men then 'relinquish one's position as a subject'. Alternatively, the men in the poems who mock the soldier's castration implicitly refer to their symbolic uncastrated selves as the ideal subjects of desire: un-wounded and whole men, unlike the wounded soldiers. It is the civilians here who are positioned as the desired ones, which therefore positions the soldiers as desiring the civilians. The soldiers have now become subjects of desire. Regarding Lacan's notion of 'structural asymmetry', Sassoon's poems, which refer to symbolically castrated men, reveal this asymmetry as a structural hierarchy of the binary of male/female, the latter being positioned as the other by which men constitute their identity on the premise that they do not lack but have the real phallus. Sassoon's poems firstly support this notion before then subverting it: men become the other. The illustration and subversion of the fragility of the gender construct is revealed, and masculinity is shown to be unstable, at risk of a symbolic castration and of being relegated to the position of the other in the gender binary hierarchy.

Sassoon goes further in subverting the public image of the solider, describing them using animal tropes, which results in a sense of abjection in the depiction of the soldiers: 'Voices would grunt […]/ he would be carried back, a jolting lump' (Sassoon, 1961, p. 19-20). On another occasion, voices are reduced to 'grunts and squeals' (p. 77). Another soldier is described, dying, as 'flapping along the fire-step like a fish' (p. 73). In 'The Death Bed,' a soldier's nightmare is like a rabid animal attack: 'the pain

like a prowling beast and gripped and tore/his groping dreams with grinding claws and fangs' (p. 35). Shell shock is presented through imagery as a wild, out of control, untamed beast, attacking soldiers, and depicted as something outside of them, entering them, possessing them. Another soldier's nightmare transforms him into a primate: 'he howled and beat at his chest' (p. 76). In 'The Dream', Sassoon drives the point home that soldiers suffering from shell shock are like animals, having lost all human identity, evoked through the memory of the past. He depicts this situation using abject sensory images.

> 'I passed a squalid farm […]
> Came the rank smell that brought me once again
> A dream of war that was in the past hidden.
> […]
> Saw them file inward, slipping from their backs
> […]
> On filthy straw they sit in the gloom […]' (Sassoon, 1961, p. 93-94).

The soldiers depicted in abject animal terms can be interpreted as the Other within the soldier. Freud notes in the 'Uncanny' that it is 'the impulse towards self-protection which has caused the ego to project such a content outward as something foreign to itself' (Freud, 1919, p. 235). Sassoon, therefore, through projection, abjection and in dehumanising the other and casting off his shame, protects himself from the idea that it may lie within him as an uncanny double.

However, there are further layers of meaning embedded in Sassoon's poetry. Firstly, the soldiers defy the public image of the heroic construct of the soldier; implicitly, the associated idea of hypermasculinity is discredited as a myth. Secondly, the soldiers, described as animals through metaphor and simile, convey their shell-shocked states. They are depicted in radical alterity as being beyond human and beyond identification, which translates as them being Others. Sassoon's depiction of

soldiers as animals constitutes not only a graphic realism contesting the perceived image of serving men but also a radical protest against perceived public perceptions.

Sassoon's poetry, by his own admission, represents a collective composition of horror and disgust. 'All squalid, abject and inglorious elements in the war should be remembered. The intimate mental history of any man who went to the War would make unheroic reading' (Sassoon, 1972, p. 238). Sassoon wrote to a friend, commenting on the poems in his anthology *Counter Attack* (1917-18), which he refers to as his 'undertaker book [noting the words] death, die, dead, recurs more than 40 times in the 39 poems – Dark and darkness 16 – War 15. Night 13. Gloom: 9. Doom: 7. Killed: 5. Corpses – only 3, I am afraid' (Moorcroft-Wilson, 2013, p. 307). Sassoon's later poems in the war take the idea of otherness and radical alterity even further, which brings to attention the notion of the abject in his poetry, which is useful to analyse from a Kristevan perspective.

According to Kristeva, abjection is the repressed horror within the psyche that, when faced, evokes a powerful psychical response:

> 'The abject thus at once represents the threat that meaning is breaking down and constitutes our reaction to such a breakdown […] what disturbs identity, system, order (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4).

In Sassoon's poem 'Stretcher Case', he offers a detailed case-like study of one soldier, which is an evocative description of the loss of identity. Sassoon graphically describes a shell-shocked soldier's thoughts, oscillating between the past and present. The abject is made present through the language in the poem, which, when combined with shell shock, only adds to the rejection of the public construct of the soldier; it ultimately equates shell shock with a protest against the public construct of hypermasculinity.

'Feebly now he drags

> Exhausted ego back from glooms and quags
> And blasting tumult, terror, hurtling glare,
> To calm and brightness, havens of sweet air.
> He sighed, confused; then drew a cautious breath;
> This level journeying was no ride through death.
> “if I were dead,” he mused, “there’d be no thinking–
> Only some plunging underworld of sinking,
> And hueless, shifting welter where I’d drown.”
> Then he remembered that his name was Brown’
> (Sassoon, 1961, p. 30).

The ‘exhausted ego’, dragged back, suggests the soldier’s conscious attempt to bring his mind away from the battlefield and the allusion to the trench – which is depicted as abject with ‘glooms and quags’ – in addition to the idea as a metaphor for the soldier’s mental state. Sensory flashbacks of sight and sound in present participles suggest the immediacy of the battlefield, complemented with ‘journeying’. As in earlier poems, the interruption of the past – ‘havens of sweet air’ – offers a temporal mental escape. There is a sense of otherness suggested by the liminality of the mind, by the intrusion of the past, and the flashbacks of the trenches. ‘Confused and cautious breath’ both suggests the difficulty, if not the resistance, of the soldier situating himself in either the past or the present.

The soldier’s musing of ‘if I were dead’ is as much a question as a comparative statement, adding to the sense of liminality; he answers himself that death would be better than his current liminal state and that it would free him from his thoughts. Once more, present participles are used to convey the present status of his mind – ‘plunging’ and ‘sinking’ – but still compared with death, the reflection further suggests the sense of liminality of being neither dead nor alive.

The stanza ends with the ‘hueless, shifting welter’, an abject, transient metaphor for the writhing mind. The noun ‘hueless’ adds to the liminal state with its meaning of gradience of colour completed with the ‘shifting welter’ – an abject

reference to blood, wounds and the mental wound evoked. The following one-line stanza reinforces the shell-shocked state of the soldier, emphasised by contrast to the return of a collected mind, as identity returns in the remembrance of his name.

The sense of another mind alludes to the sense of a lost self; this, coupled with the evocation of blood, is reminiscent of Kristeva's notion that facing the abject means facing the loss of identity. Kristeva's concept of the abject is used to conceptualise disruption, when there is 'a loss of distinction between self and other, and places where meaning collapses, and the ego, the 'I', is challenged' (Kristeva, 1982, p .3). She adds: 'abjection does not respect borders, positions or rules' (1982, p. 4). Kristeva goes on to describe how abjection also happens within the social body with the potential to disrupt the order of phallocentric society. This is perhaps Sassoon's ultimate protest about the war, presenting his work through the shell-shocked mind of a soldier, who in a possession-like state is hardly in control of his mind, as he grapples with the strangeness within.

Kristeva further suggests that the abject is anything that threatens to contaminate cleanliness or anything that evokes a reaction of disgust or repulsion, particularly so regarding the body, bodily fluids or waste.

> 'Refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being' (Kristeva, 1982, p. 3).

So, for Kristeva, it is not the actual defilement itself but the feeling that one must confront when facing the abject, which triggers a confrontation with one's own existence and evokes a response towards the reflection of subjectivity and mortality, which we cast off. Kristeva's notion of abjection results therefore from a threat to the stability of oneself: 'It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but

what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite' (1982, p. 4). The objects that tend to be abject are either connected to the boundaries of the body, e.g. excrement and menstruation, or they are associated with boundary transgression, e.g. the skin of the milk or decomposing bodies (1982, pp. 2–4). The abject, therefore, relates to problems of securing a delimited self.

In **'**Died of Wounds', Sassoon evokes Kristeva's notion of disgust, subjectivity, and facing mortality.

> 'His wet face and miserable eyes
> Brought nurses to him more than groans and sighs;
> […]
> Next morning he was dead;
> And some Slight Wound lay smiling on the bed.'
> (Sassoon, 1961, p. 28).

In another poem, 'The Death Bed', Sassoon writes that 'Through crimson gloom to darkness; and forgot/The opiate throb and ache that was his wound' (Sassoon, 1961, p. 34). Here, the soldier is reduced to merely a wound. 'The Effect' continues in the same vain, presenting the abject and death:

> "He'd never seen so many dead before."
> They sprawled in yellow daylight while he swore
> […]
> "He'd never seen so many dead before."
> The lilting words danced up and down his brain,
> While corpses jumped and capered in the rain.'
> (Sassoon, 1961, p. 73).

The three poems above resonate with Kristeva's description of the abject:

> 'The corpse seen without God and outside of science is utmost of abjection […]. It is something rejected from which one does not part … It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but that which disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite'. (Kristeva, 1982, p. 166)

In each poem, what was once a subject has now been reduced to an object. Sassoon uses the body as a political protest, to confront and subvert the social and culturally constructed image of the soldier as a hero. The deconstruction of the body not only subverts the heroic image but also turns the bodies inside out. Literally with the wounds and symbolically with death, Sassoon brings the hidden images of war to the public eye. The bodies also represent the ultimate portrayal of lack in that they are no longer alive. However, the men presented in the abject and object state are still animate. Here, Sassoon continues with jolting subversion: the wound smiles, another wound which is kept numb through opiates still throbs, the corpses jump and caper, they dance playfully. In death, there is a grotesque depiction of *jouissance*. From this perspective, shell shock is a response to, or more specifically a consequence of, failed masculinity.

Shell shock is implicitly equated to a site of *jouissance* – a *jouissance* generated as a direct consequence of the Other society that placed demands on men, in addition to the trauma of war, to perform in a socially manufactured, designed and expected performance, which exaggerated traditional notions of masculinity. It was a hypermasculinity that consequently exceeded men's actual and real behaviour, producing a divide between expectation and reality, resulting in the body rejecting the pressure of the demand to perform hypermasculinity, which I suggest manifested as shell shock.

Kristeva's theory of othering and her concept of the abject both depend on the tenet that each person wants a secure, self-contained identity and that such an identity is never achieved. The instability of the self produces anxiety and motivates each person to make their identity appear more stable to themselves. The desire for a stable identity, expressed through abjection and complemented by othering, casts off that

which is unpalatable to the self. Sassoon's poetry presents the complex struggle for masculine identity, at times identifying with the image of the solider, as seen in Chapter One, but at other times expulsed through the guise of the poet in the critical commentaries he offers from a social perspective. Kristeva further notes that there is a complex space of split subjectivity in the foreigner; this is very clear within Sassoon, as illustrated in this chapter. Kristeva adds that:

> 'it is perhaps […] that contemporary individualism's subversion, begins with the moment when the citizen-individual ceases to consider himself as unitary and glorious but discovers his incoherence's and abysses, in short, his 'strangeness' (Kristeva, 1991, p.2).

The split within Sassoon – implicit in the roles of soldier and poet, explicit in Chapter Two and implicit in this chapter – is Sassoon's gradual awareness and the revelation of the 'incoherence and strangeness' of the self. This split self, along with the abject presented through his writing, projected as other, was potentially a defence against a potential dissolution of the self, 'as unitary and glorious' – a defence against the recognition of the instability of masculinity.

Conclusion

In 1917, Sassoon wrote a letter to the military authorities; he also sent the letter to *The Times* newspaper for publication. In it he stated:

> 'I am making this statement as an act of wilful defiance of military authority. I have seen and endured the suffering of troops, and I can no longer be party to prolonging those sufferings for ends which I believe to be evil and unjust' (Moorcroft-Wilson, 2013, p.234).

Three days later, Sassoon was told that he would be sent to Craiglockhart to receive treatment for shell shock. It has been reported that 'In a fit of frustration and anger, he threw his M.C. ribbon into the Mersey, the most extreme act of rebellion against the army he could conceive' (Moorcroft-Wilson, 2013, p.242). Sassoon's act of throwing his medal into the river and his rebellion against the army could equally suggest a rejection of the hypermasculinity propagated in the war and an awareness of his performance. Furthermore, throwing away the medal not only reflected his political views of the war but represented a critique of society, as it was the political forces that started the war which instigated the performance of hypermasculinity, beginning from the recruitment campaign and continuing into the war. From this reading, Sassoon throwing away his medal cast society as abject, and thus the soldier within him as abject too – a performance that he could no longer continue.

The dialectical relationship of soldier and poet, conversely actor and spectator offered in my reading of Sassoon's poetry, has provided a pivotal foundation to analyse Sassoon's poetry. I have explored how there was a splitting of the ego – for

Sassoon, a result of the demands of the propagated heterocentric, hypermasculine soldier role that he was expected to perform, which was set against his homosexuality and his emerging disillusionment with the war. I have also assessed how Sassoon explored and attempted a reconciliation of his own status as a poet and a soldier and the subsequent conflict, which I suggested was conceptualised through Oedipal conflicts in Sassoon's working through his conflicted duality. His writing allowed him space and reflection to work through the complex struggle of identity, and at the same time offers a critique of masculinity in the war, which leads to an implicit reflection on the links between shell shock and masculinity in the war.

Sassoon's poetry suggests the fragility of himself as a subject, a poet, positioned as a soldier performing in the war. Poetry for him was a reflective tool to contemplate the horrors of the war and consequently his subjectivity, and crucially how his environment forced him to perform and adapt to the abject horrors that he was so critical of. The attempted conciliation between the poet and the soldier fails, which contributes to his splitting and eventually to his conscious protest and refusal to fight in the war. The notion of assimilating the big Other's desires – those of society – contributes to the conflict of Sassoon's psychical struggles and splitting expressed in his poetry. Sassoon's psychical split could also be read as a fear of accepting the illusion of wholeness, triggered by this un-reconciliation of the poet and soldier. Sassoon's dissonance is reflected in the split between the solider and poet with the soldier portrayed as abject, conceptualised through the poet.

My argument suggests that society's expectations of men performing in the war created a chasm between what society desired and promoted in regard to the soldier, and that what transpired in reality resulted in emotional conflict, which I suggest contributed to Sassoon's shell shock. I illustrated, through examples of gender

performance, how Sassoon strived towards the idealised masculine image of the soldier and subsequently failed to achieve it. Disillusionment with the war and the expectations upon men to perform a hypermasculinity led my argument to extend the ideas of castration anxieties and guilt introduced in Chapter One. Sassoon uses the idea of castration anxieties as a social critique on gender constructs in society. Sassoon resists and subverts the image of the ideal warrior through his poetry.

There is a complex relationship between Sassoon and masculinity. On the one hand, Sassoon strived towards assimilation and acceptance, motivated by the desire of the Other (that is, society) to perform hypermasculinity, epitomised in his 'Mad Jack' persona. Sassoon also played out a re-enactment of the desire to be the imaginary phallus for the mother through his heroic acts, with the mother substituted by society. This re-enactment is bound up with Sassoon as an actor, based on a denial that he could achieve the hypermasculinity and repression of Oedipal conflicts, as discussed in Chapter One. Such denial and repression culminated in a failure to compensate for any misgivings that he may have had about the war, or indeed about his failings of not being masculine enough – all of which contributed to the psychical dichotomy expressed in his poetry. In another sense, Sassoon's masquerade also links to desire in that it is a fear of lack, disavowing symbolical castration, and a rejection of being the other. Sassoon desires to fulfil the Other's desire, which is achieved by transforming himself into an object of desire: the warrior soldier, which, as noted, would have led to failed *jouissance* and contributed to his forceful critique of performing hypermasculinity in the war.

The anticipated *jouissance* for Sassoon is driven by desire, strived for, but not met, as noted in his 'Mad Jack' performance. There was a gap between expected desire and actual desire, which I suggest contributed to his critique of the war, which

was a phallic *jouissance* – desire not met. Lacan acknowledges the potentially destructive power of *jouissance*: ‘It begins with a tickle and ends in a blaze of petrol. That's always what *jouissance* is’ (Lacan, 1969- 1970, p. 72). I therefore suggest that Sassoon’s depiction of shell shock in his poetry is a manifestation of phallic *jouissance* – a failure to achieve the hypermasculinity of the war.

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